

THE MARVEL MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE-FICTION / AUGUST 1982 / \$2.50 - 1£ U.K.

epicTM

ILLUSTRATED

this is the
WEIRDWORLD
the final
chapter

also:
rites of spring
by Arthur S. Collins

the
GRAIL
by Michael
Chabon



epic

ILLUSTRATED

AUGUST 1982

VOL. 1, NO. 13

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Cover/Mike Saenz

painting ©1982 Mike Saenz

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SYNOPSIS

Somewhere in the endless heavens, a cosmic game is being played, an eternal contest between the champions of Light and Darkness. The shifting of the various pieces across the great chessboard, their gains and losses, are reflected in the lives of those who dwell in Weirdworld, the strange and wondrous land beneath.

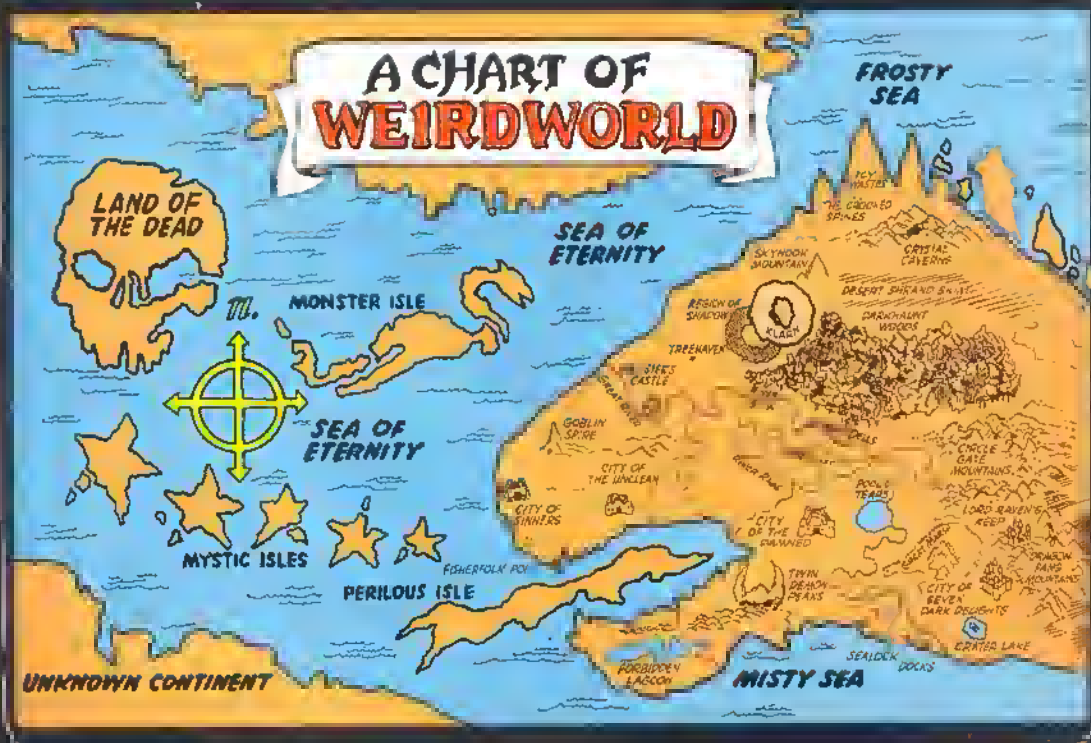
A few of those whose lives have been touched by the game of the gods are: *Tyndall* and *Velanna*—a pair of innocent elves who long to return to their home, the floating island of *Klarn*, and who have no memory beyond the recent past.

Mud-Butt the dwarf—their loyal and irascible companion.

Lianissa—a wizard whose powers and life-force are rapidly fading—and her beloved, Wulfbuck—wielder of the sword of Glorywand.

Black Majister and his henchman, Murkandor—a pair of evil soicerers secretly working to gain control of Velanna, for they believe that she and Tyndall are somehow crucial to the fate of Weirdworld.

Now, aided by the dragons of Klarn, immense beasts over which Tyndall has shown an instinctive and inexplicable mastery, the heroes must find Black Majster and recover the great crystal shield of Klarn, an artifact which he has stolen. If they fail, Majster will use the shield's power to tip the balance of the cosmic game in favor of Darkness—forever.



PART 4 CONJURATIONS OF CRYSTAL

YOU'VE CHANGED TYNDALL OF KLARN, ASTRIDE YOUR BEAST, RED SORILL, YOU'VE SOMEHOW BEEN GRANTED A MEASURE OF MATURITY-- AND THE AUTHORITY TO COMMAND.

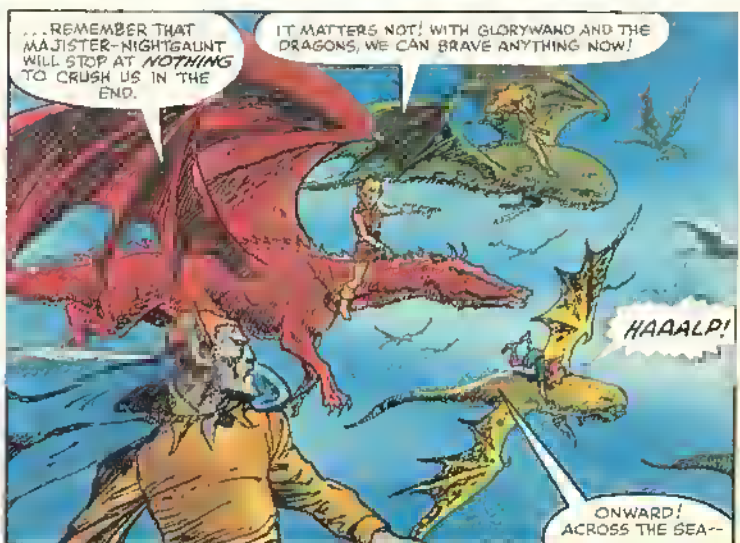
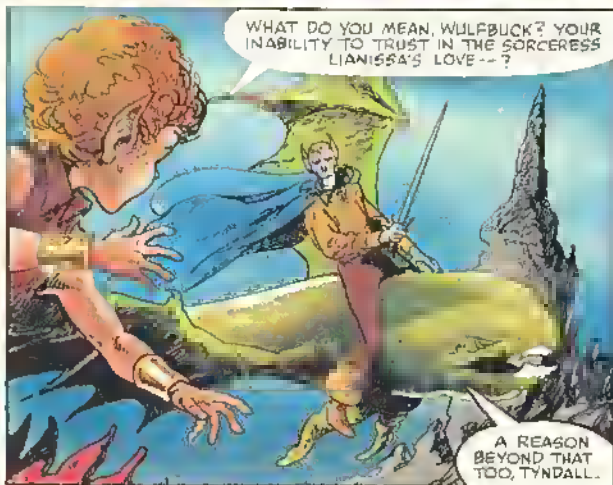
HE'S JUST A SHOW-OFF, IF YOU ASK ME.

OF COURSE I'VE CHANGED! IT'S A GREAT DAY-- THE BEST OF MY LIFE! COME ON-- THE DRAGONS WON'T HURT YOU!

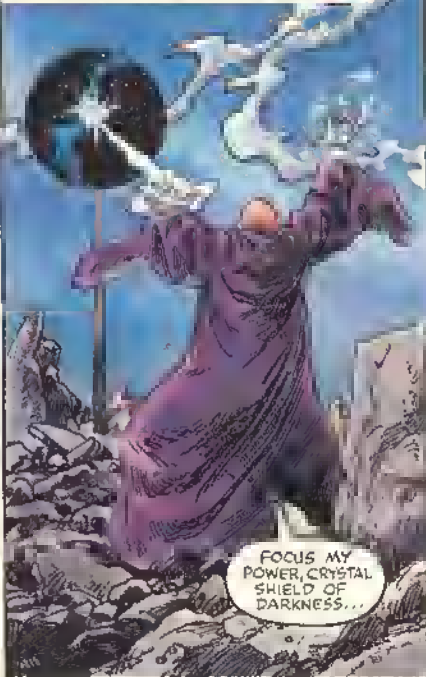
WE'LL SOAR BEYOND THE WIND-- AND ONCE YOU TASTE THE FEELING OF POWER ON A DRAGON'S BACK, YOU'LL *KNOW* WE CAN'T LOSE AGAINST BLACK MAJISTER!

THAT'S EASY FOR *YOU* TO SAY, TWIT-- YOU'RE A BORN DRAGON-MASTER! BUT WHAT ABOUT A COMMON DWARF LIKE ME, WHO'S AFRAID OF DRAGONS AND HEIGHTS?!

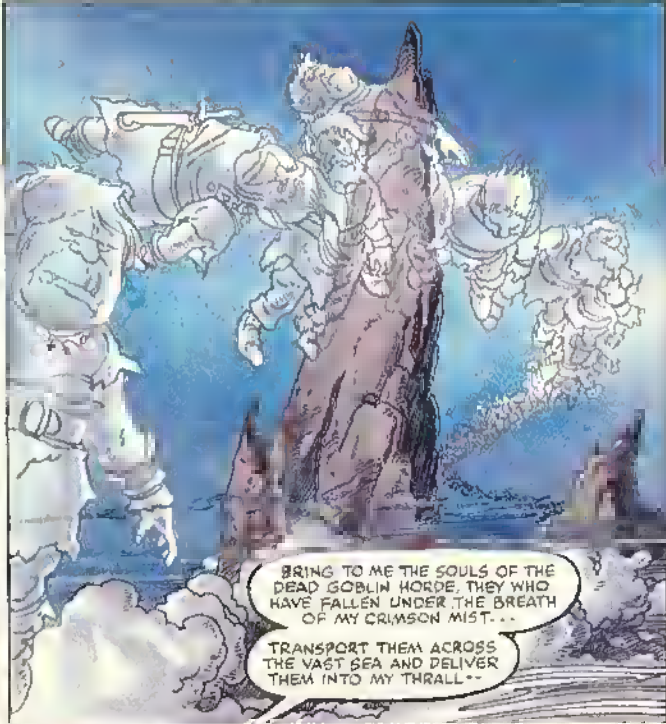
COME ON, WULFBUCK! YOU'VE CHANGED TOO-- WITH GLORYWAND IN YOUR HAND, YOU'VE GOT NEW CONFIDENCE! YOU LOOK LIKE A REAL *HERO*!



"--TO THE FOUL HAUNT OF MAJISTER-NIGHTGAUNT, IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD!"

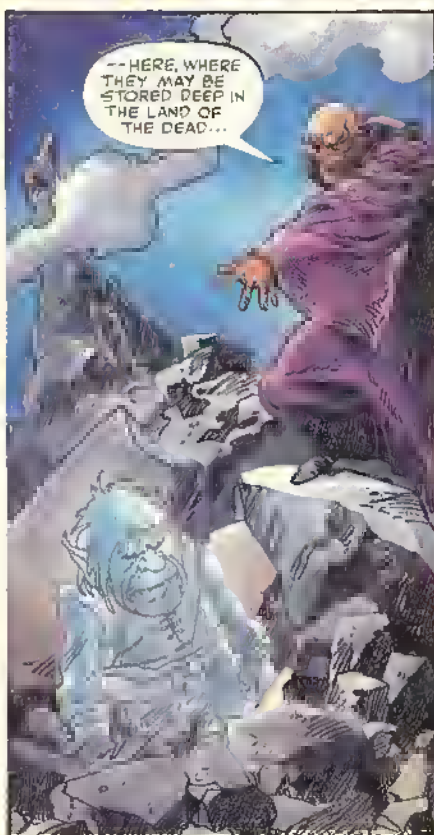


FOCUS MY
POWER, CRYSTAL
SHIELD OF
DARKNESS...



BRING TO ME THE SOULS OF THE
DEAD GOBLIN HORDE, THEY WHO
HAVE FALLEN UNDER THE BREATH
OF MY CRIMSON MIST...

TRANSPORT THEM ACROSS
THE VAST SEA AND DELIVER
THEM INTO MY THRALL--



--HERE, WHERE
THEY MAY BE
STORED DEEP IN
THE LAND OF
THE DEAD...

EXCELLENT!
SOON I'LL HAVE
AN ARMY OF DEATH
THAT **NO ONE** CAN
DEFEAT, NOT THE
GODS OF LIGHT
ABOVE NOR ANYONE
ON WEIRDWORLD
HERE BELOW...NOT
THE ELVES, NOR
WULFBUCK,
NOR EVEN--



"--THE PALE LIANISSA, SHE WHO IS THE
WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN."

HEED ME, SOUL-SPRITES... MY
METAPHYSICAL JOURNEY TO
WULFBUCK IN THE TAVERN HAS
WEAKENED ME BEYOND MEN...
NOW I CANNOT EVEN RISE,
AND STILL THE EVIL GROWS,
WEAKENING ME FURTHER AS
IT FEEDS ON MY STRENGTH...



IF MY LOVER
WULFBUCK AND
THE ELVES FAIL...
MY LIFE WILL PASS
ON TO THE HIGHER
PLANE...

AND THEN ALL THAT I HAVE CARED FOR,
EVERYTHING I HAVE LIVED FOR, ALL MY
HOPES AND CARES AND LOVES AND DREAMS...

...WILL
BECOME
DUST...

"EVEN NOW IT STEALS SILENTLY AMONG
THE GOBLIN HORDE WITHOUT..."

...NOTHING
MORE THAN
FAILED
GAMBITS
IN THE GODS'
MOCKING
GAME...

IT GROWS WORSE, LIANISSA,
FOR THE RED MIST OF
NIGHTGAUNT HAS COME...

"THUS THE GOBLIN SIEGE IS ENDED, LIANISSA BUT
I FEAR WE ARE NOW PRESSED BY SOMETHING
FAR MORE DIABOLICAL..."

"...CARRESSING
THEM WITH ITS
SCARLET VAPORS,
SLAYING THEM
AND SEIZING
THEIR SOULS..."

...FOR THE RED
MIST RISES HIGHER
AROUND SKYHOOK.

THEN TIME IS
SHORTER THAN
I DREAMED, SOUL-
SPRITE. IF WULFBUCK
AND THE ELVES DO
NOT BY SOME
MIRACLE SUCCEED,
THEN SOON WE
SHALL ALL
BREATHE THE

...AND HAVE
DONE WITH
EVERYTHING.

WHILE, FAR OUT OVER
THE GLITTERING SEA...

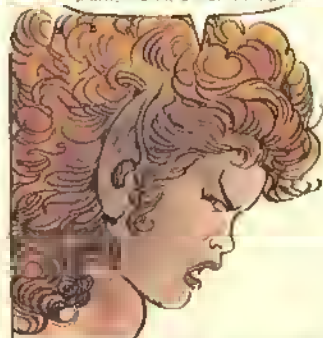
WE'VE ALREADY PASSED THE
MYSTIC ISLES--IT WON'T
BE LONG NOW.

AYE, TYNDALL, THE SWIFTNESS
OF OUR FLIGHT SURPASSES UNDER-
STANDING--AND CAN ONLY BE
ATTRIBUTED TO THE WONDEROUS
AND MAGICAL NATURE OF THE
BEASTS WE RIDE.



... SHE WHO SILENTLY MURDERS QUIETLY IN RESPONSE TO AN UNHEARD VOICE.

YES, I KNOW-- THE TIME DRAWS NEAR, I WON'T FAIL.



BUT IN TRUTH SHE SPEAKS TO MASTER'S SERVANT MURKANDOR THROUGH THE HOLLOW GLASS STATUE NOW COMPLETELY FILLED WITH BLACKNESS...



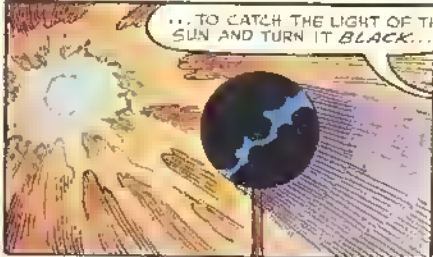
AND, IN THE BARREN LAND OF THE DEAD...

NOW! NOW THAT THE LAST OF THE GOBLIN SOULS HAS BEEN IMMERSSED IN THE BOSOM OF THIS DEAD SOUL...



-- IT IS TIME TO EMPLOY THE KLARN SLEEP-CRYSTAL FOR THE OPPOSITE OF ITS ORIGINAL PURPOSE...





...TO CATCH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN AND TURN IT *BLACK*...



...TO FOCUS ITS DISMAL DARK RADIANCE UPON THE TORMENTED GROUND...UNTIL IT SEEPS DOWNWARD, QUESTING QUESTING...



...AND FINALLY AWAKENS MY VAST ARMY OF THE DEAD FROM THEIR NOT-SO-ETERNAL SLEEP...

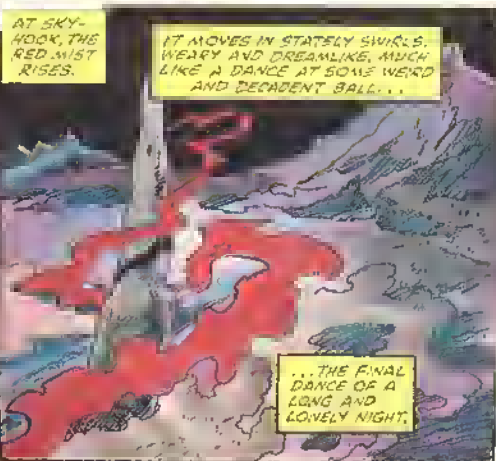
...DRESSING THEM AGAIN IN FLESH...

...THE CORRUPT FLESH OF DARKNESS AND DEATH!

WE COME LORD AND MASTER!

WE AWAIT YOUR COMMANDS, BLACK MAJISTER!

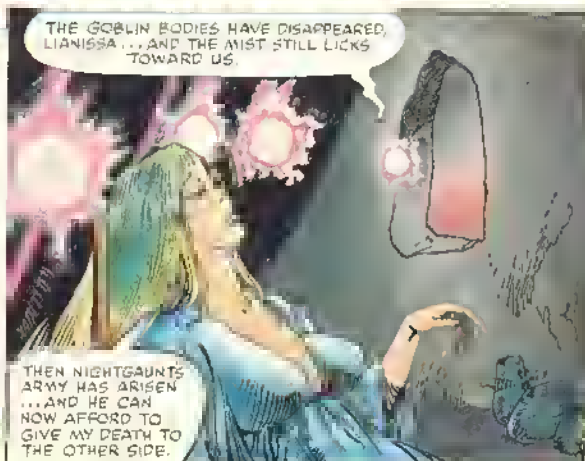
AND WE SHALL OBEY, LORD NIGHTGAUNT!



AT SKY-HOOK, THE RED MIST RISES.

IT MOVES IN STATELY SWIRLS, WEARY AND DREAMLIKE, MUCH LIKE A DANCE AT SOME WEIRD AND DECADENT BALL...

...THE FINAL DANCE OF A LONG AND LOVELY NIGHT.



THE GOBLIN BODIES HAVE DISAPPEARED, LIANISSA...AND THE MIST STILL LICKS TOWARD US.

THEN NIGHTGAUNT'S ARMY HAS ARISEN...AND HE CAN NOW AFFORD TO GIVE MY DEATH TO THE OTHER SIDE.

HEAR ME, MY ARMY! YOUR LORD COMMANDS! SOON WE SHALL FIGHT OUR FINAL BATTLE ON THIS PLANE-- AND WE FIGHT FOR NEITHER TERRITORY NOR TREASURE! WE LUST FOR ONE PRIZE ALONE!

WE LUST FOR RIVERS OF BLOOD AND SHOALS OF BONES! WE LUST FOR THE SWIFT DEALING OF DEATH AND **DEATH ALONE!**

YOU NEED FEAR NOTHING, FOR YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD! YOU STAND WITH ONE FOOT IN THE HIGHER PLANE EVEN NOW, AND THE FORCES OF LIFE HOLD NO DREAD FOR YOU! WE CANNOT BE STOPPED! WE CAN ONLY CONQUER!

AND ONCE WE HAVE CONQUERED THE ENTIRE WORLD AND CONVERTED IT TO THE FORCES OF DARKNESS, THEN WILL THE STAGE BE SET FOR THE SUPREME BATTLE BEYOND ALL BATTLES...

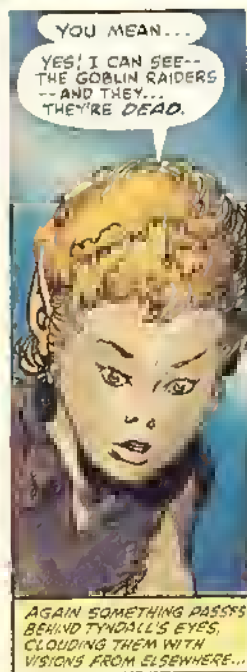
...THE FINAL CLASH OF THE HIGHER PLANE... THE WORLD-- ENDING **WAR OF THE GODS!**



THE LAND OF THE DEAD, WULFBUCK-- AT LAST! BUT ITS SURFACE-- ITS FACE-- SEEMS TO BE CRAWLING WITH MOVEMENT... SHIFTING... WRITHING...

...AS IF THE SKULLFACE HAS TAKEN ON FLESH AND COME ALIVE!

AYE, TYNDALL-- BUT ONLY A **MOCKERY OF LIFE.**



YOU MEAN...

YES! I CAN SEE-- THE GOBLIN RAIDERS-- AND THEY... THEY'RE **DEAD.**

AGAIN SOMETHING PASSES BEHIND TYNDALL'S EYES, CLOUDING THEM WITH VISIONS FROM ELSEWHERE...

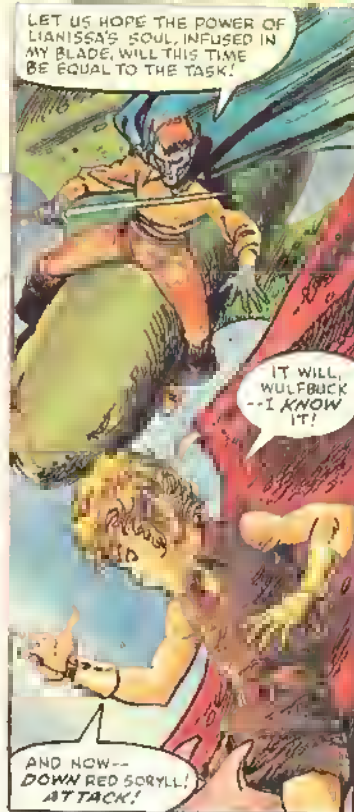


ILLIANOR! HEPHESTIUS ILLIANOR! ILLIANOR!

OH, NO... MY HEAD... MY STOMACH! HAVE I FALLEN OFF YET?

OH, NO... NOW THE **IT'S SINGING AGAIN!**

BUT THE STRANGE CROONING SWIFTLY **FADES...**



LET US HOPE THE POWER OF LIANISSA'S SOUL, INFUSED IN MY BLADE, WILL THIS TIME BE EQUAL TO THE TASK!

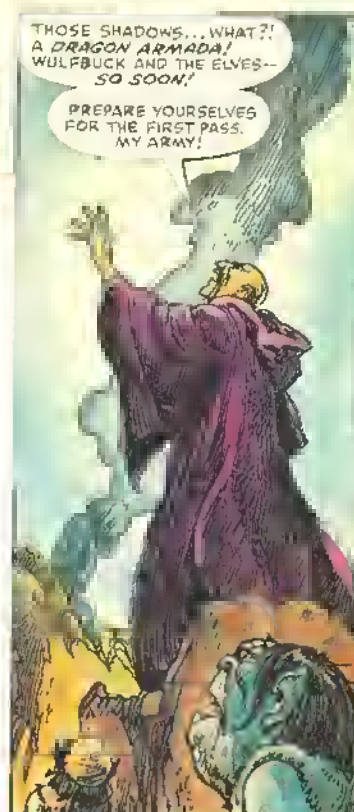
IT WILL, WULFBUCK-- I KNOW IT!

AND NOW-- DOWN RED SCRYLL! ATTACK!



YAOOWWW! THIS IS IT-- I THINK I'M GONNA BE SICK!

THE MOMENT DRAWS NEAR-- I MUST BE READY.



THOSE SHADOWS... WHAT?! A DRAGON ARMADA! WULFBUCK AND THE ELVES-- SO SOON!

PREPARE YOURSELVES FOR THE FIRST PASS. MY ARMY!



BELCHING FLAME AND SLICING THE SKY FROM GOLDEN SUN TO BARREN GROUND, THE DRAGONS ATTACK.

WULFBUCK TIGHTENS HIS GRIP ON GLORY-WAND AND SITS HIGHER ASTRIDE HIS MOUNT.

TYNDAL WHOOPS WITH A FIERCE AND PREVIOUSLY ALIEN FERVOR, SNATCHING A GOBLIN SCIMITAR AS IF IT WERE TOSSED TO HIM.

AND THE DEAD THINGS WHICH ONCE WERE GOBLINS... BEGIN TO LAUGH.

ADRIFF IN THE ERUPTING CHAOS, MASTER-NIGHTGAUNT TURNS TO FACE AN OLD ENEMY...

GLORYWAND-- WHOLE AGAIN!

AYE, DEMON-- AND SOON TO BE TEMPERED IN YOUR BLACK BLOOD! EVEN YOU FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR THE STRENGTH OF MY UNION WITH LIANISSA!

AND THE ELF TYNCALL HAS PROVEN TO BE A DRAGON-MASTER, HIS ANCIENT POWERS AWAKENED BY YOUR OWN FOUL SCHEME!

SO YOU SEE, DARK GOD, THE DRAGONS WHICH YOU HOPED WOULD WORK PETTY MISCHIEF SHALL PROVE TO BE YOUR DOWNFALL-- YOUR OWN EVIL COAVING BACK TO HAUNT YOUR FINAL DEFEAT!

PERHAPS WULFBUCK...

... BUT EVEN IF THE BLADE IS AGAIN WHOLE, YOU ARE NOT!

AM I RIGHT, BEAST-MAN?

YOU GAVE ME A MERE MASK-- I AM THE SAME BENEATH

AND USE THE KLARN SLEEP-CRYSTAL AS A SHIELD IF YOU WILL, NIGHTGAUNT, BUT THE MAN WITHIN ME WILL THIS TIME BE STOPPED BY **NOTHING!**

BUT NO CRACK MARS THE PERVERTED DISC AS GLORYWAND SLAMS UPON ITS DARKLY GLISTENING FACE.

INSTEAD--

HAH! YOU ARE A FOOL, WULFBUCK-- AND SO EASY TO DECEIVE! THE CRYSTAL IS MORE THAN A SHIELD-- IT IS A **WEAPON!**

SEE HOW THE POWER OF YOUR BLADE IS ABSORBED AND REFLECTED BACK UPON YOU!

SEE HOW THAT POWER SEIZES GLORYWAND ITSELF-- AND FORCES IT TO YOUR THROAT!

NO! GOT TO FIGHT IT!-- HOLD IT BACK!

CAN'T LET YOU TURN MY ONE STRENGTH AGAINST ME!

LESS THAN A DOZEN PAGES FROM WULFBUCK'S STRUGGLE, THE GOBLIN ZOMBIES RESPOND WITH BOW AND ARROW TO THE WITHERING ATTACK OF THE LEVIATHANS...



RIDERLESS DRAGONS ARE HIT



THEY PLUMMET, PINWHEELING TO THE HARD GROUND...

...WHERE AWAITS SAVAGE LAUGHING DEATH



THEN TYNDALL, TOO, SPIES A FORMER ENEMY.

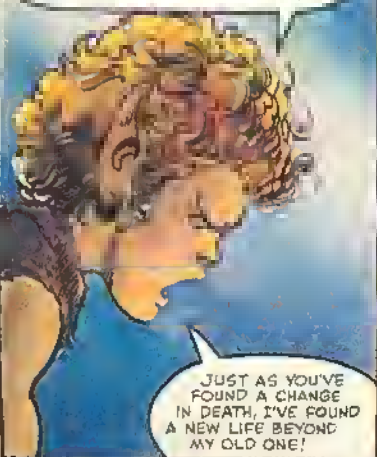
SHREEKAR! THE GOBLIN CHIEFTAIN!

YOU! THE PITIFUL ELF-SO-SMALL WHO STOLE SHREEKAR'S FEMALE FLESH-NOT FOR COOKING! YOU ARE THE CAUSE OF ALL THIS!



HAD I STOPPED YOU FROM REACHING THE WIZARD OF SKYHOOK MOUNTAIN, I WOULD STILL LIVE FOR MANY HOT-COLD CHANGES TO COME! BUT I VOWED THE SCORE WOULD BE SETTLED IN DEATH-DEATH-AND SO IT SHALL!

BRAVE WORDS FROM A WALKING PIECE OF DEATH HIMSELF, SHREEKAR. BUT IF YOU WANT THE SCORE SETTLED I'M HARDLY RUNNING THIS TIME!



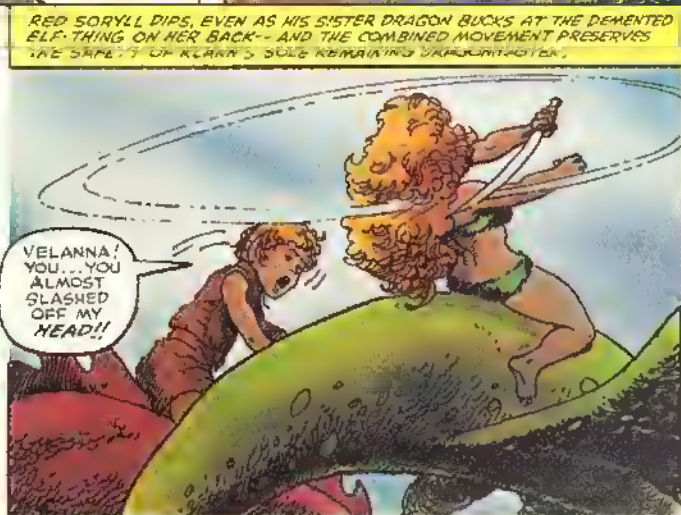
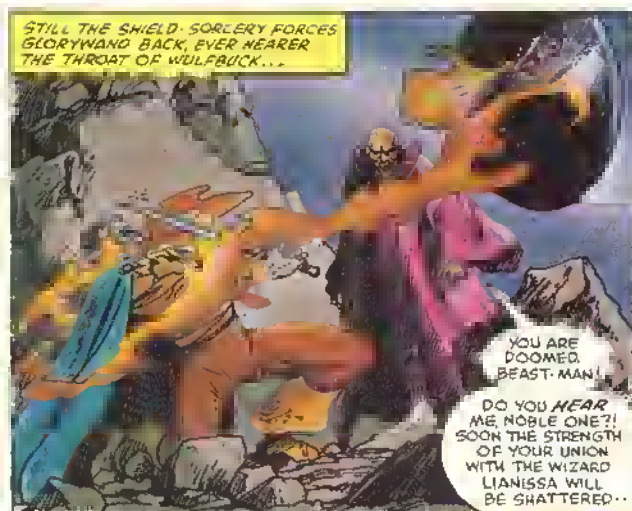
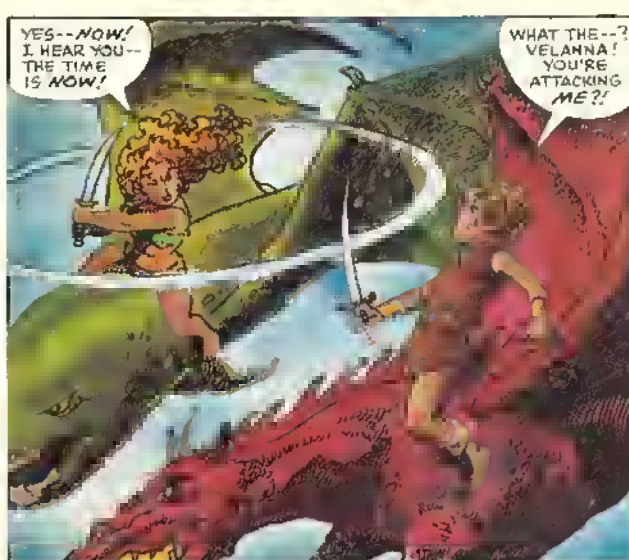
JUST AS YOU'VE FOUND A CHANGE IN DEATH, I'VE FOUND A NEW LIFE BEYOND MY OLD ONE!

AND, ACROSS THE SEA WHERE MURKANDOR STILL LURKS IN MAJISTER'S CHAMBERS...



NOW, CAPTIVE ELF!

THE TIME IS NOW!!



TRUE DAY HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN TO SHINE ON THE LAND OF THE DEAD... BUT NOW, AS AN IDLE GAME OF THE GODS NEARS ITS END NO NIGHT HAS EVER REIGNED BLACKER, OR MORE CRUELLY...

HOLD STILL, YOU STUPID BEAST! LET ME DO WHAT MUST BE DONE!

NO, VELANNA!
STOP IT! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND--?!

YOUR DRAGON WILL NOT ATTACK ME-- IT WOULD SOONER DESTROY YOU!

GET OFFA ME, YA STINKIN' DEAD THINGS! BY THE DWARF MOTHER'S HAIRY TEAT-- IF I STILL HAD MY TRUSTY POWER ROD I'D TEACH YA A THING OR TWO ABOUT BEIN' DEAD...!

NUMBER ONE-- YOU'RE S'POSED TO LIE DOWN AND BE STILL!





NO, GLORYWAND! I WIELD YOU--
I AM YOUR MASTER--YOU MUST
NOT SLAY ME!

STRUGGLE
NO MORE, YOU
PITIFUL MORTAL
FOOLS!

IN ONE SWEEPING
MOMENT OF BLACK
MAJESTY, I SHALL PUT
AN END TO ALL YOUR TERROR,
ALL YOUR WOES-- AYE, AND
ALL YOUR HOPE, ALL YOUR
ECSTASY!

YOU HAVE
BUT TO
YIELD!



STORY BY MARGARET GALLAGHER
ART BY JAMES ROMBERGER



IT IS A HOT AFTERNOON.



TRASH WHISPERS, AND PUNKS SHOW CUBE TRAYS TO THE GALS.



PUNKS ARE VICIOUS
AND KILL
'MOST EVERY DAY.



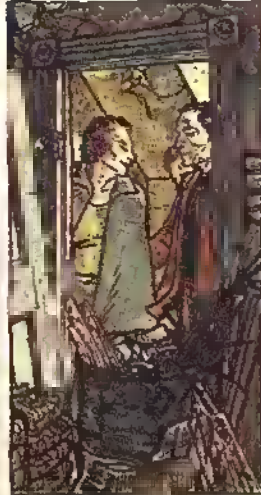
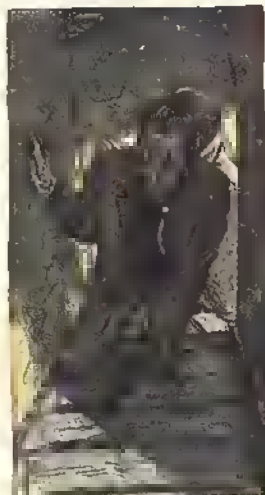
Story ©1982 Margaret Gallagher/ Art ©1982 James Romberger



NO WINDOWS HERE.



SOME OF THESE GUYS REMEMBER WOODSTOCK. MOST DO NOT.



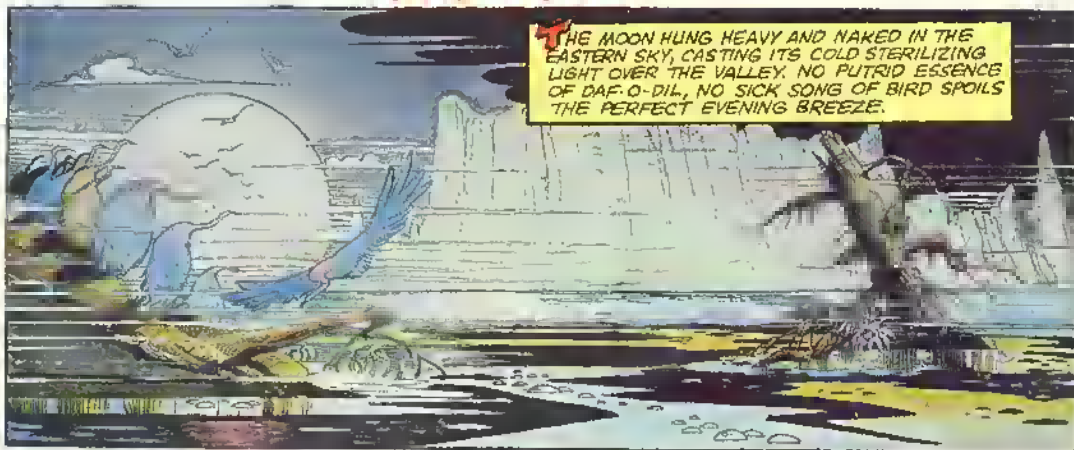
AND YET, HERE... IN THE DECAY AND DISARRAY... JUST UP HERE...



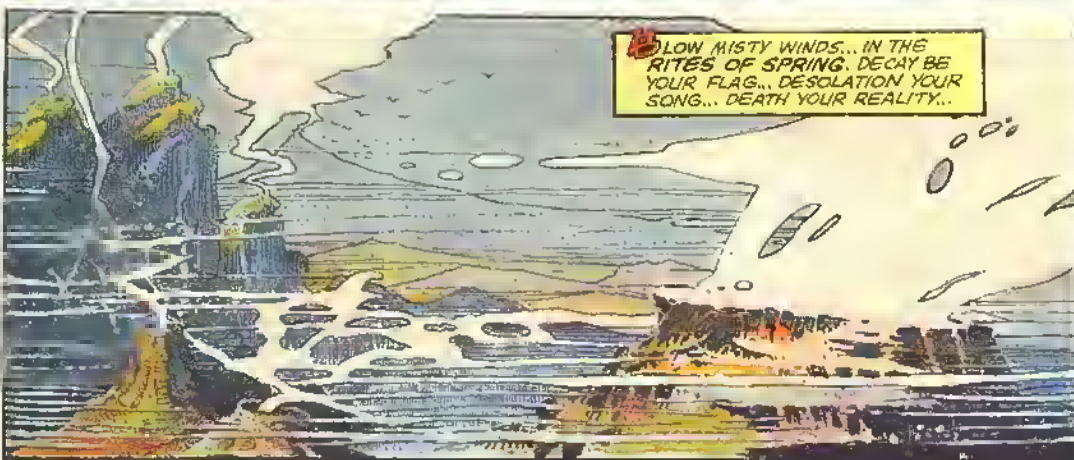
IN THE HEART OF THE CITY.



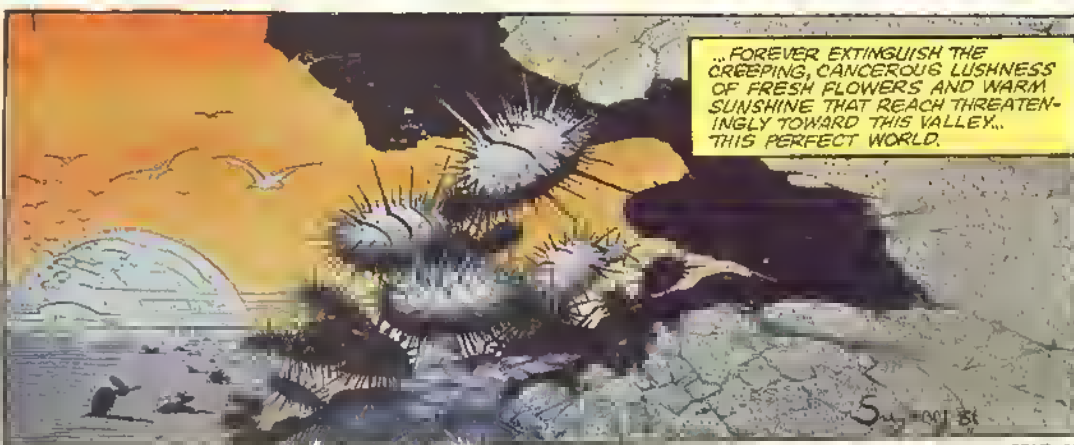
PROLOGUE:



THE MOON HUNG HEAVY AND NAKED IN THE EASTERN SKY, CASTING ITS COLD STERILIZING LIGHT OVER THE VALLEY. NO PUTRID ESSENCE OF DAF-O-DIL, NO SICK SONG OF BIRD SPOILS THE PERFECT EVENING BREEZE.

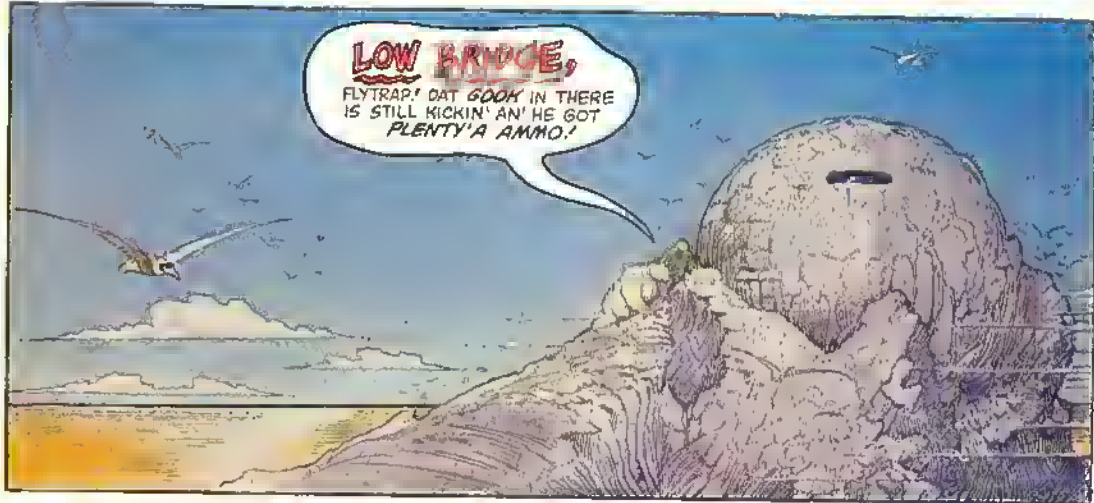


LOW MISTY WINDS... IN THE RITES OF SPRING. DECAY BE YOUR FLAG... DESOLATION YOUR SONG... DEATH YOUR REALITY...



...FOREVER EXTINGUISH THE CREEPING, CANCEROUS LUSHNESS OF FRESH FLOWERS AND WARM SUNSHINE THAT REACH THREATENINGLY TOWARD THIS VALLEY... THIS PERFECT WORLD.

Suydam 001 81



YEH... WHAT
YA WANT?

IF YA SURRENDERS
PEACEFUL LIKE AN' SAYS
UNCLE
GOOK... I'LL GIVE YA SOME'A
THIS ASS-KICKIN' GOOD
POT I GOT HERE!

OKAY! I IS **COMIN'** OUT
ACCORDIN' TO TH' LIVIN' LAW
SET DOWN BY **DASH #4** OF TH'
GEE-NEE-VAH CODE!

YOU... UH... YOU
PROMISES T'GIMME
SOME **POT** WHEN I
COMES OUT...?

CROSS MY HEART
AN' HOPE T'DIE!

OKAY! HERE I AM!
WHERE MY REEFER?

PUN-TA! **KLIK**
PUN-TA! **KLIK**
PUN-TA! **KLIK**
PUN-TA! **KLIK**
PUN-TA! **KLIK**
PUN-TA! **KLIK**

ARG!

by ARTHUR Suydam

THE
ADVENTURE
OF
JOLLY
NO
EXTRAP!



THE
RITES
OF
SPRING



IT'S ALL RIGHT,
FLYTRAP... I SEE
'EM!

FROM THE WEST THEY CAME. THE HUGE GAPIING MOUTH OF THE FERTILIZER
STRETCHED OPEN TO RECEIVE THE VAST QUANTITIES OF WASTE AND DECAY
IT SO EFFICIENTLY CONSUMED, DIGESTED, AND TRANSFORMED INTO
MOUNTAINS OF FERTILE TOPSOIL USED TO ENRICH THE PLANET'S
CRACKED SURFACE. THEY MARCHED IN A RELENTLESS, UNVEERING LINE,
THEIR MISSION TO FOLIATE A DEAD WORLD...

...MOVING LIKE A SLUG,
SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY...
LEAVING BEHIND A TRAIL
OF FLOWERS, GRASS, AND
FRESH MOSS...

**FORWARD
YA LAZY
GOLDBRICKS!**

POP! CRACKLE!
COME IN SEARCHER
ONE...! DO YOU READ
ME? **POP!** COME
IN...!

MORE SEEDS!

MORE DOOKY!

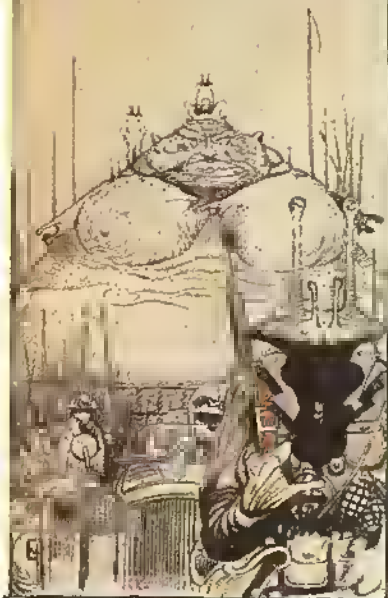
JEEZUS!
WILL YA LOOK
AT DIS PLACE?!
NOT A PEE-TUN-
YA IN SIGHT!

YEH... BUT DIS
FERT-O-DUTY
SURE IS CAKE!

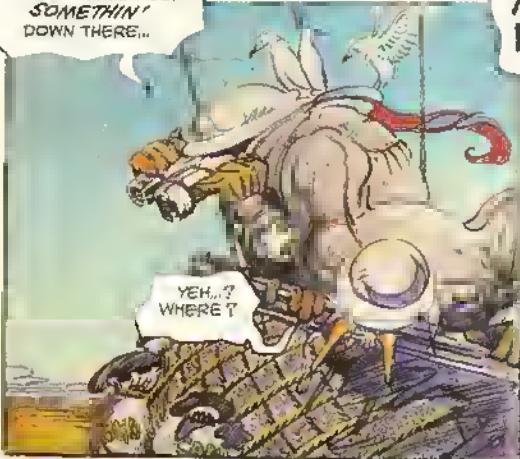
HEY, **SARGE...**! ONE'A DA SCOUTS
WE SENT OUT EARLIER AIN'T AN-
SWERIN' HIS RADIO!

BUZZ! **CRACKLE!** COME
IN... **POP!** SEARCHER
ONE...! **PAC!**

LATER...



Uh-huh...DEFINITELY
SOMETHIN'
DOWN THERE...



YEH...?
WHERE?



ME, TOO!

ME, THREE!

I'M SENDIN' YOUSE
TWO TA SCOUT AHEAD!
SEE IF YA CAN SPOT
SEARCHER ONE WHILE
YER OUT THERE AN' IF
YA DO GOOD, YOUSE
CAN BALL TH' FERTILIZER
WHEN YA GET BACK.

HOT DOG!

BRING US DOWN
A LITTLE CLOSER...
THINK I SEE
SOMETHIN'...



HOLD STILL
WILL YA?



HEY!
WHAT
TH--?!

**SUPERB,
FLYTRAP!**

NOW
WATCH
THIS!
YUK!

... AN' GOD BLESS
LITTLE RALPHIE
N' SUZIE AN'...

**BULL'S
EYE!**

KLIK!

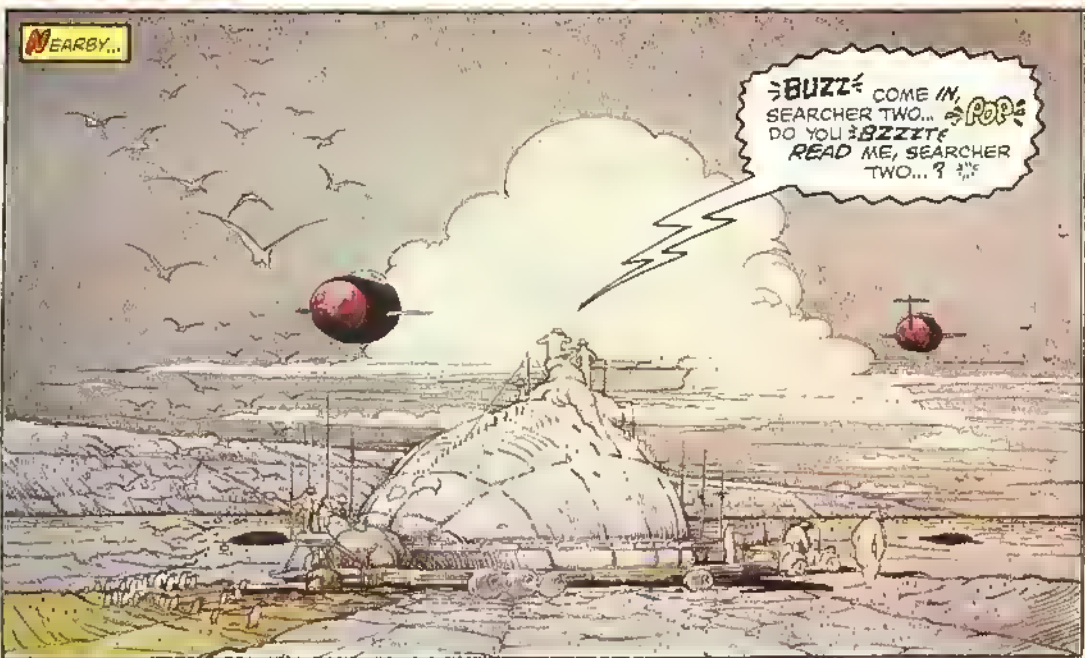
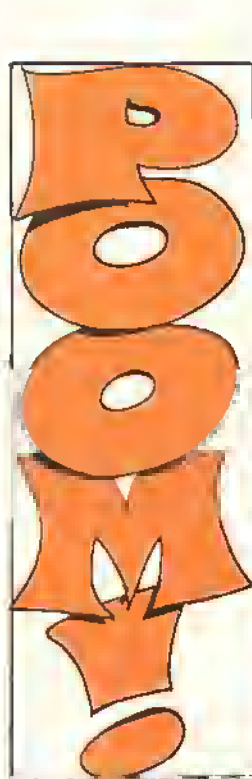
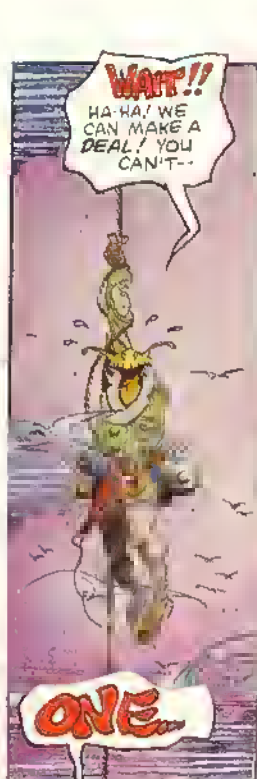
POOM!

AAIEEEEE!!

WELLLLL NOW...
WHAT WE GOT
HERE, FLYTRAP?

PLEASE!!
SOB: NO KILL THIS
ONE! *Wimper*
NO KILL!

TELL YA WHAT, GOOK...
YOU CLIMB THAT ROPE BEFORE
I COUNT T' **THREE**... I'M GONNA
LET YA **KEEP YER SLIMY
GOOK SKIN!**



SYNOPSIS

Two earthmen—marine biologist *John Isaac* and submarine commander *Falco*—have been shanghaied by a spaceshipful of aliens who hunt whales across the reaches of space.

To prepare the prisoners for duty aboard his strange, treelike vessel, *Captain Rotwang* turns them over to his ship's surgeons, enormous insects known as the *Xlexu*. The *Xlexu* strip Isaac of his skin, replacing it with a transparent membrane suited to the atmosphere within which he must now work. In addition, they have tampered with his mind, joining the two halves of his brain, which are separate in most humans, and giving him the ability to generate and release, but not control, an immensely powerful *aura*. *Falco* has been decapitated, his body set in robotlike motion, tending the ship's furnaces, while his intellect and emotions remain trapped in his disembodied head.

Isaac accepts a devil's bargain which *Rotwang* offers him, agreeing to aid in the hunting and killing of whales—especially *Abraxas*, the great whale *Rotwang* hates above all others—in payment for his own and *Falco*'s full restoration and eventual return to earth. Bewildered and sickened by the job he has taken on, Isaac turns for comfort to another product of the *Xlexu* skill, the leopard/woman known as *Sphinx*.



ROTTX AND THE EARTHMAN

written and illustrated
by
RICK VEITCH

LAST SUPPER

PROPELLED BY THE SOFT KISS OF THE SOLAR WIND, HELD ALOFT BY HER GREAT GRAVITY FURNACES, THE PAN-GALACTIC WHALING SHIP YORRIKKE SLIPS THROUGH THE DARKENING SKIES OF THE WHALE PLANET...

STRAIGHT INTO THE TEETH OF AN APPROACHING STORM FRONT SHE SAILS...

DIRECTED, AS IF BY UNSEEN HANDS, TO AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER!

SHIP HO!

I RECOGNIZE HER, SHE'S THE YMIR, UNDER THE FIRM HAND OF CAPTAIN DOLPHIN, OUT OF KALIGHOUL JUST TWO YEARS BEFORE US!

SHE'S BEEN BADLY MAULED CAP'N ROTWANG!

HO, DOLPHIN! YOU'LL NEVER MAKE LIGHT SPEED WITH THOSE SHREDDED SAILS! YE'RE WELCOME TO COME WITH US, BUT HAVE NOTICE... WE'RE IN PURSUIT OF HIS MAJESTY, ABRAXAS!

NINE SHIPS HE'S FEASTED ON, THIS SEASON ALONE...

AND STILL YE HUNT HIM?

I HAVE SWORN AN INVIOLEABLE
OATH THAT THE RED WHALE'S
HORNS SHALL HANG FROM
THESE YARDARMS, AND HANG
THEY SHALL!

HAVE YE
ENCOUNTERED
HIM?

OH,
YES...

IN FACT
HE AND I
MADE A
BARGAIN,
WE DID!

I GAVE
HIM **ALL** ME
WHALEBOATS
AND TWO-SCORE
GOOD MEN...

AND HE LEFT
ME **HALF** A SHIP
AND **HALF** A BODY
TO FLOP ABOUT
WITH!

SO
LEAVE
US!

WE'LL TAKE
SLOW DEATH
IN THE VOID
BEFORE YOU'LL
SEE US FLY
INTO THOSE
TERRIBLE
JAWS
AGAIN!

LOOK WELL, DOLPHIN!
HERE IN MY HAND DO
I HOLD HIS DEATH!

TEMPERED
IN **BLOOD** THIS
BARB AND I'LL
TEMPER IT
DOUBLY WHEN
IT BURSTS HIS
GREAT
HEART!

THEN YE BEST
KEEP A WEATHER
EYE PEELED FOR
HIM, ROTWANG...

HE'LL NOT
GIVE YE MORE
THAN **ONE**
CHANCE--

...IF
THAT
EVEN...

SO MAY
AMMA HAVE
MERCY ON ALL
YER SOULS...

I FEAR THE
HARPOON IS NOT YET
FORGED THAT
WILL BRING
HIM DOWN...

HELL AND DAMNATION!
THE DEMON HAS SWALLOWED
DOLPHIN'S SPIRIT AS WELL
AS HIS LIMBS!

MAKE YE NO
MISTAKE--ROTWANG'S
SPIRIT STILL ABIDES WITHIN,
ALBEIT SCREAMING FOR
VENGEANCE!

HE SURE CAN
BE CRUEL, CAN'T
HE, KITTEN?

WHAT A
THING TO WAKE
UP TO!

WHAT'S HIS
PROBLEM
ANYWAY,
SPHINX?

IT TAKES A SPECIAL TYPE
OF MAN TO HELM A SHIP
AND CREW ACROSS THE
GALAXY FOR A
WHALE HUNT!

ROTWANG
HAS ALL
THE NEEDED
QUALITIES--
TO THE
EXTREME!

PAROON
ME IF I
REMAIN
UNIMPRESSED,
BUT AFTER
WHAT HE
ORDERED
DONE TO
FALCO
AND ME...

DON'T FEEL TOO SORRY
FOR YOURSELF, KITTEN... MOST OF
US HERE HAVE BEEN ALTERED BY THE
XLEXU, IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE US
FIT FOR DUTY IN THE VOID!

TAKE ME FOR INSTANCE!
MY KIND HAVE BEEN BRED
BY THE XLEXU JUST TO SERVE
IN THE HIGH BRANCHES OF
THE WHALERS WHERE THE
TWO-LEGGERS CAN'T GO!

THE
XLEXU'S
SURGICAL
TALENTS ARE
REALLY THE
BACKBONE
OF THE
FLEET!

I THINK THEY'VE
CONNECTED MY
BRAIN'S TWO
HEMISPHERES
INTO ONE UNIT!
NOW I'M ABLE TO
REACH OUT AND
TOUCH THE
WHALES WITH
MY THOUGHTS!

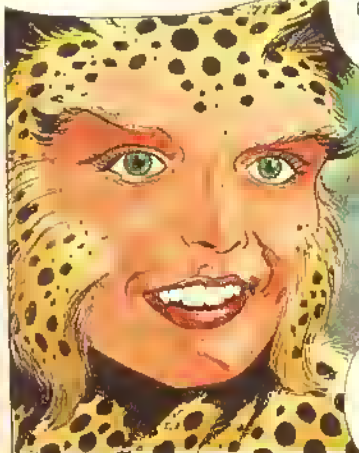
...AND OLD
ROTWANG'S
GOT BIG PLANS
FOR YOU,
I BET!

HEY, EARTHMAN!
THE CAPTAIN WANTS
YOU IN HIS CABIN
FOR DINNER!

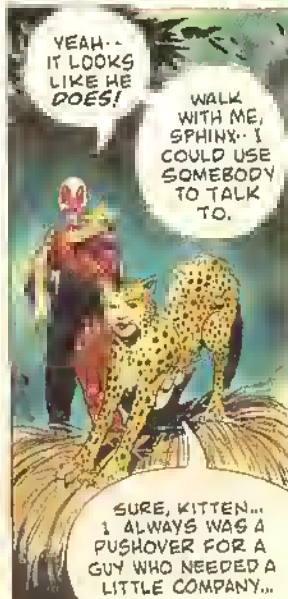
YEAH--
IT LOOKS
LIKE HE
DOES!

WALK
WITH ME,
SPHINX-- I
COULD USE
SOMEBODY
TO TALK
TO.

SURE, KITTEN...
I ALWAYS WAS A
PUSHOVER FOR A
GUY WHO NEEDED A
LITTLE COMPANY...



BUT WHAT'S
THIS I HEAR
THEY'VE
DONE TO
YOUR
BRAIN?





I HAVE
A **VERY**
BAD FEELING
ABOUT THIS
ABRAXAS
BUSINESS...

DON'T WE
ALL THE CREW
IS PETRIFIED!

THEY DON'T
KNOW IF THEY'RE
FACING A WHALE
OR SOME FIGMENT
OF ROTWANG'S KABOI
IMAGINATION!

IT'S A WHALE
ALL RIGHT! BUT
SOME SORT OF
MUTANT I THINK!
THE SONG HE
SINGS IS PAIN-
WRACKED...
TORMENTED!

AND THE
WEIRDEST
PART OF ALL
IS HE SEEMED
TO **RECOGNIZE**
ME! IS SUCH
A THING
POSSIBLE?

KITTEN...
WITH THE XLEXU
AND THEIR **SPECIES**
MANIPULATION,
YOU'VE GOT TO
BE READY FOR
ANYTHING!

A RACE OF
INSECTS ACTING
AS AGENTS FOR
EVOLUTION--
FASCINATING!

WHAT
EVER YOU
CALL IT...
IT **WORKS!**
WILL YOU BE
COMING BACK
UP TO THE
NEST AFTER
DINNER...?

SPUNKY--
YOU'RE A
GODSEND!
THE XLEXU
THEMSELVES
COULDN'T
KEEP ME
AWAY!



AVAST!
OUR GUEST
OF HONOR
HAS
ARRIVED!

COME SIT BY
ME, MR. ISAAC! YER
ABOUT TO TASTE THE
FINEST SUCCULENT
IN SEVEN
GALAXIES!

BUT FIRST
A TOAST
TO OUR **NEWEST**
CREWMAN!

FALCO! ARE
YOU ALL RIGHT?

YOU BET, ISAAC,
NOW THAT YOU'VE
DECIDED TO WORK
FOR ROTWANG!

YOU'LL SEE--
EVERYTHING IS
GOING TO BE OK!



EH, SHUT
YER BLOODY
SWEAR-HOLE!

OW!

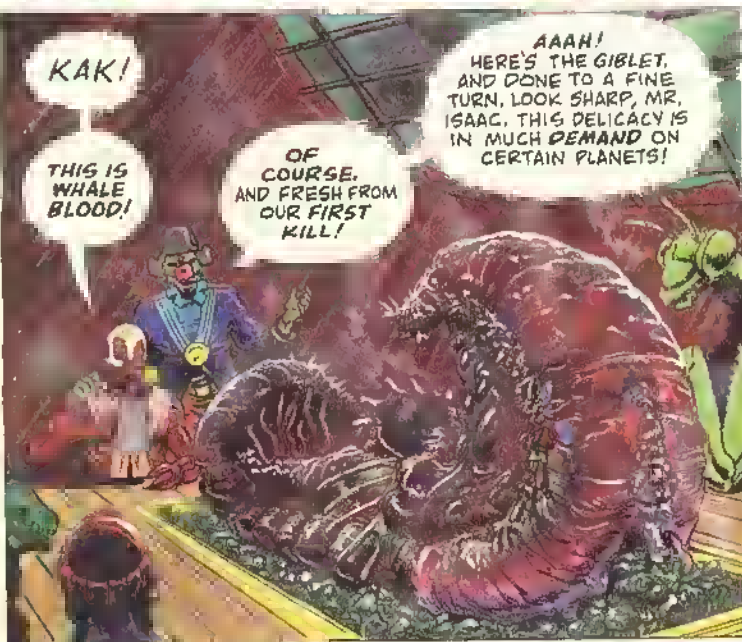
TAKE A
SLUG OF THIS,
EARTHMAN-- IT'S
GOOD FOR WHAT
AILS YE!

HEY!
DON'T HIT
HIM LIKE
THAT!



I DON'T WANT TO
HEAR NO MORE
OF THAT INSOLENT
LIP! DRINK IF YE
VALUE THIS SKIN
TIED 'ROUND YER
NECK! HAR HAR!

HMMPH.

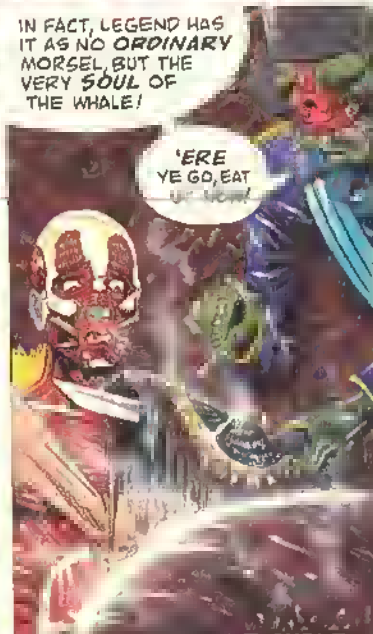


KAK!

THIS IS
WHALE
BLOOD!

OF
COURSE,
AND FRESH FROM
OUR FIRST
KILL!

AAAH!
HERE'S THE GIBLET,
AND DONE TO A FINE
TURN, LOOK SHARP, MR.
ISAAC. THIS DELICACY IS
IN MUCH DEMAND ON
CERTAIN PLANETS!



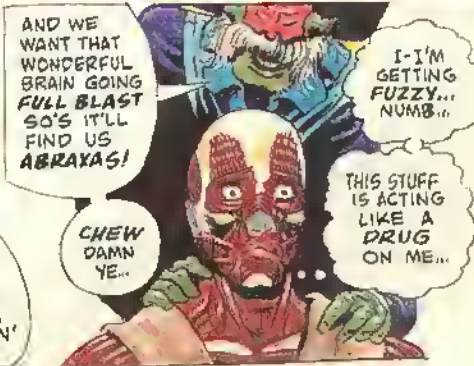
IN FACT, LEGEND HAS
IT AS NO ORDINARY
MORSEL, BUT THE
VERY SOUL OF
THE WHALE!

'ERE
YE GO, EAT
UP NOW!



IT IS ISAAC'S SCIENTIFIC
CURIOSITY THAT FINALLY
OVERCOMES HIS DEEP
NATURAL REVULSION.

GOOD! GOOD!
NOW THESE XLEXU
WITCH DOCTORS TELL ME
THIS WILL WORK LIKE A
CATALYST ON YER ALTERED
BRAINS! SORT OF GIVE 'EM A
LITTLE JOLT TO GET 'EM GOIN'
IN GOOD SHAPE!



AND WE
WANT THAT
WONDERFUL
BRAIN GOING
FULL BLAST
SO'S IT'LL
FIND US
ABRAXAS!

CHEW
DAMN
YE...

I-I'M
GETTING
FUZZY...
NUMB...

THIS STUFF
IS ACTING
LIKE A
DRUG
ON ME...

AS A SCIENTIST I'M NOT UNFAMILIAR WITH THE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN MIND ALTERING DRUGS...

EAT, DAMN YER EYES!

...I CAN HANDLE... THIS...

EAT!

...NO PROB...

AS ISAAC'S CONSCIOUSNESS IS SWAMPED BY THE POTENT DRUG, AN INSTINCTIVE REACTION IS TRIGGERED WITHIN HIM...

HE'S ALL LIT UP!

JUST LIKE HE DONE AT THE INITIATION!

ONLY THIS TIME, WHATEVER IT IS, IS BREAKIN' FREE!

IT MAKES A MAN FEEL WEIRD IN HIS SOCKETS...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN, KLEXU?

WHERE IS IT GOING?

IT IS HIS AURA, ROTWANG...

...AND IT IS GOING TO FIND ABRAXAS!

IT WILL LEAD THE
WHALE BACK HERE
TO YOU!

NOTHING
CAN STOP
IT NOW!

GODD, THEN
I'LL NOT HAVE
TO PUT UP WITH
THIS INSOLENCE
ANY LONGER!

SLAY THE
EARTHMAN!

YOU CAN'T
DO THIS... YOU
PROMISED!

IT ALL COMES BACK TO
WHAT YE AND I WERE SAYING
ABOUT PRINCIPLES... HOW
SOME FOLKS HAS 'EM...
AND OTHERS DON'T...

WELL... I
DON'T!

HAVE
DONE WITH
IT, STAUB.

WHAT
BLASPHEMY
IS THIS?

THIS ONE
MUST NOT DIE,
ROTWANG!

KILL THE
OTHER IF YOU
WISH, BUT WE
DEMAND THE
LIFE OF
ISAAC!

WHAT?
YE DARE MAKE
DEMANDS ON
MY SHIP?

YE KNOW
HIS AURA
WILL RETURN
TO THAT
SKINLESS
BODY AND
CAUSE ME
NO END OF
GRIEF!

HIS DEATH
WOULD REMOVE
AN ESSENTIAL
INGREDIENT
FROM A VERY
IMPORTANT
EXPERIMENT!

WE MUST
LIVE AT
ALL
COSTS!

I'M THE
CAPTAIN
HERE, AND
I SAY HE
DIES!

KILL
'EM,
MATES!

BLOT
'EM ALL
OUT!

THEN IT'S
MUTINY, AND
YE'VE SEALED
YER OWN
FATES!

WATCH IT!
PLEASE!
OOWWWW!



THE
GAME IS UP,
MY BROTHER!
DELIVER THE
EARTHMAN
TO HIS
DESTINATION!

MY LIFE
IS FORFEIT
TO THE GREAT
EXPERIMENT!

SKEWER
EM, YE
SCURVY
MAGGOTS!

TREACHEROUS
INSECTS!

XLEXU
SURGEONS
HAVE SERVED
FAITHFULLY
ON EVERY
WHALER
SINCE THE
FIRST ONE
SHIPPED
OUT OF
KALIGHOUL!

WHY
NOW THIS
TREASON?
WHY?

WHAT
IN
HELL...?

THE DYING XLEXU'S
ANSWER COMES
NOT IN WORDS...



...BUT IN A
VISION!



A TANTALIZING VISION OF THE
BROTHERHOOD OF THE XLEXU
THAT HINTS AT THEIR TRUE
MOTIVES...



...AND A DEVASTATING
VISION OF SELF!

AS THE XLEXU DIES, THE
VISION FADES...BUT NOT
SO ITS IMPACT!

CAN
IT
BEE?

ARE THE
WHALING
SHIPS AND THEIR
CAPTAINS MOVED
ABOUT LIKE
LITTLE PIECES
ON A VAST
KLEXU
GAME
BOARD?

WHALE
HO!

IS
ROTWANG'S
UNCONTROLLABLE
VENGEANCE ONLY
PART OF SOME
INSECT'S
GREATER
STRATEGY?

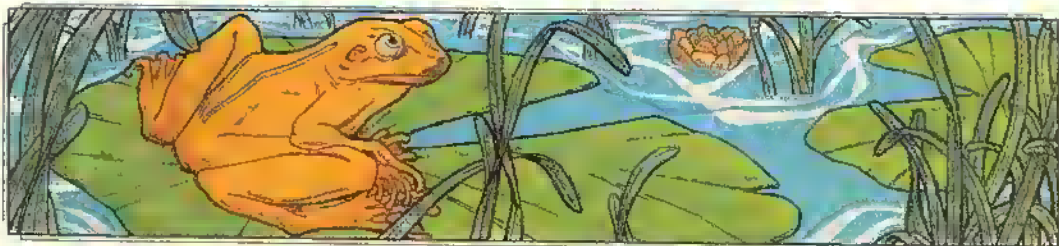
O-CAPTAIN!
--L'LOOK!

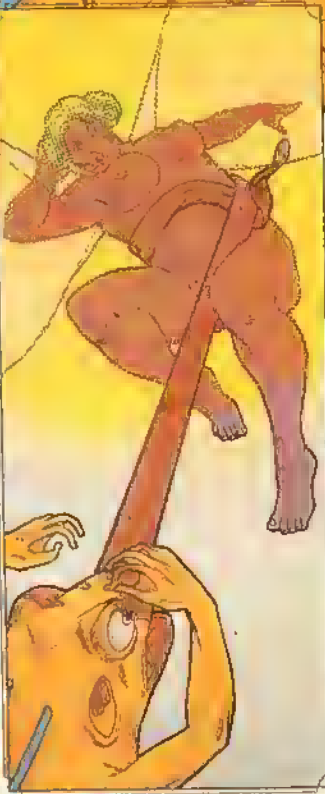
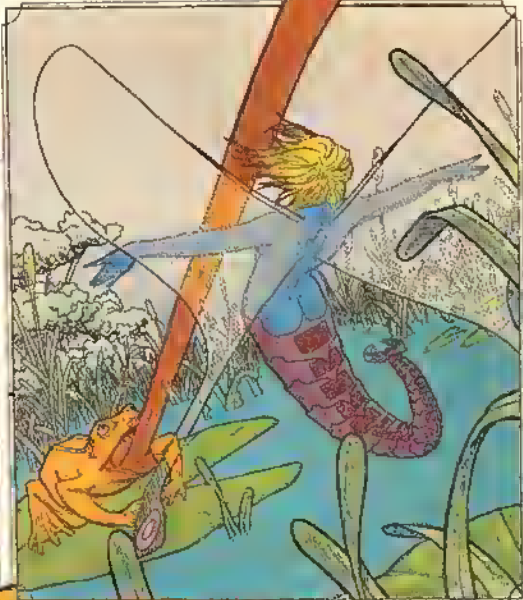
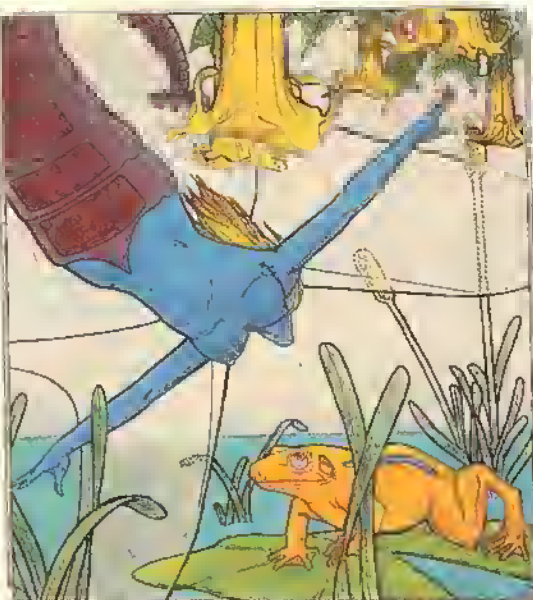
HELLS
BELLS!

IT IS
ABRAXAS!

ABRAXAS & THE EARTHMAN continues next issue

TOPAZ





SURVIVAL

"YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN." SO SOME TWENTIETH CENTURY WRITER CLAIMED.

OUT IN THE COLONIES, NOT MANY WOULD DISAGREE. BUT SO LONG AS IVERS AND FOULARD WERE WILLING TO TAKE THE ACTUAL RISKS, THERE WAS ENOUGH SUPPORT TO MAKE A RETURN TRIP POSSIBLE.

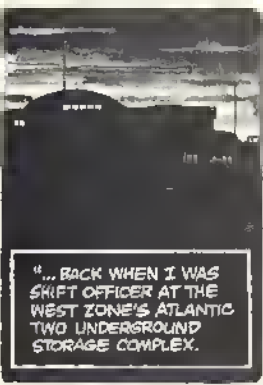
IVERS CAME OUT OF COLD SLEEP FIRST, AND SAW JUST WHAT HE'D BEEN WAITING TO SEE. JOURNEY'S END. EARTH.

HE MOVED TO FOULARD'S CAPSULE. ITS LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS HAD MALFUNCTIONED EARLY IN THE TRIP. JUST AS IVERS HAD PROGRAMMED THEM TO DO. SATISFIED, HE SUITED UP.

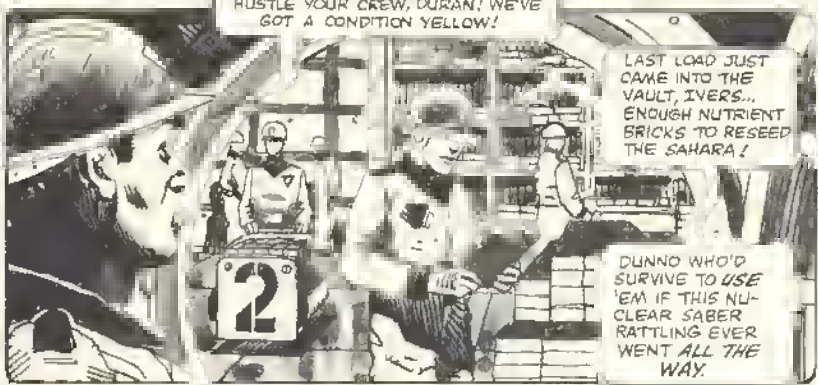
...AND MADE HIS WAY TO THE BIG SHIP'S SHUTTLE CRAFT.

KNOWING WHAT I KNOW, YOU'D HAVE DONE THE SAME, FOULARD... YOU WERE JUST AS MUCH A BASTARD AS I AM. THESE DAYS EVERYBODY HAS TO BE...

...IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SURVIVE. I'VE JUST BEEN AT IT LONGER. SINCE BEFORE THEY BLEW THIS PLACE TO HELL...



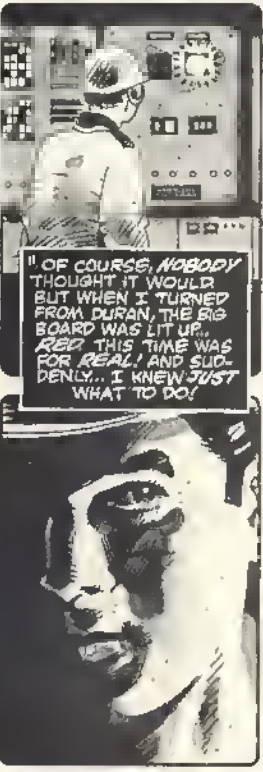
"...BACK WHEN I WAS
SHIFT OFFICER AT THE
WEST ZONE'S ATLANTIC
TWO UNDERGROUND
STORAGE COMPLEX.



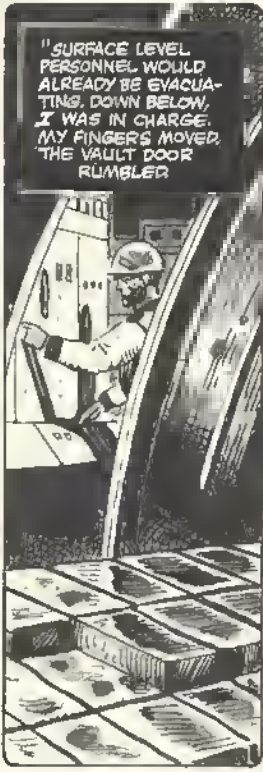
HUSTLE YOUR CREW, DURAN! WE'VE
GOT A CONDITION YELLOW!

LAST LOAD JUST
CAME INTO THE
VAULT, IVERS...
ENOUGH NUTRIENT
BRICKS TO RESEED
THE SAHARA!

DUNNO WHO'D
SURVIVE TO USE
'EM IF THIS NU-
CLEAR SABER
RATTLING EVER
WENT ALL THE
WAY.



"OF COURSE, NOBODY
THOUGHT IT WOULD
BUT WHEN I TURNED
FROM DURAN, THE BIG
BOARD WAS LIT UP.
RED. THIS TIME WAS
FOR REAL! AND SUD-
DENLY... I KNEW JUST
WHAT TO DO!



"SURFACE LEVEL
PERSONNEL WOULD
ALREADY BE EVACUA-
TING. DOWN BELOW,
I WAS IN CHARGE.
MY FINGERS MOVED.
THE VAULT DOOR
RUMBLER

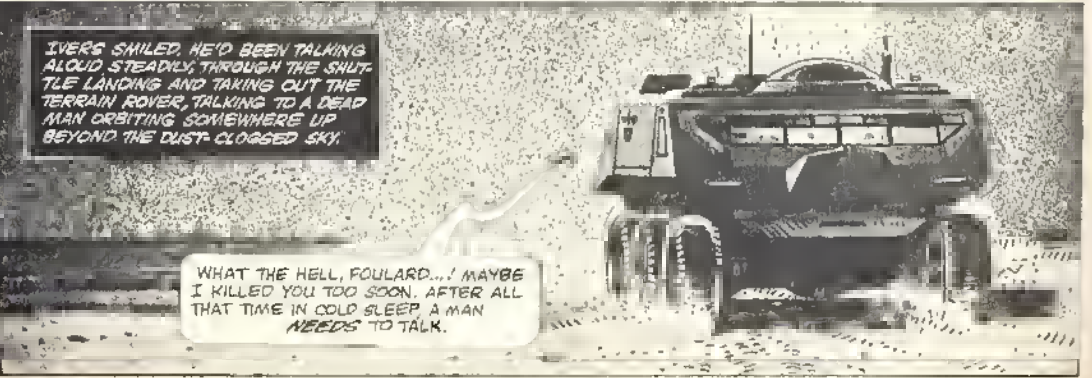


"DURAN AND THE
OTHERS LOOKED UP
WIDE-EYED FROM
THE STACKED BRICKS
OF ULTRA-DENSE
NUTRIENT... TOO LATE

IVERS!
FOR GOD
SAKE!!



"I WAS ALREADY ON
MY WAY WHEN ALL
THEIR SCREAMS
WERE SEALED OFF
BY A GREAT HOLLOW
KLANG, FOULARD."



IVERS SMILED. HE'D BEEN TALKING
ALoud STEADILY, THROUGH THE SHUT-
TLE LANDING AND TAKING OUT THE
TERRAIN ROVER, TALKING TO A DEAD
MAN ORBITING SOMEWHERE UP
BEYOND THE DUST-CLOSED SKY.

WHAT THE HELL, FOULARD...! MAYBE
I KILLED YOU TOO SOON. AFTER ALL
THAT TIME IN COLD SLEEP A MAN
NEEDS TO TALK.



AND, STILL SMILING,
HE WENT RIGHT ON.

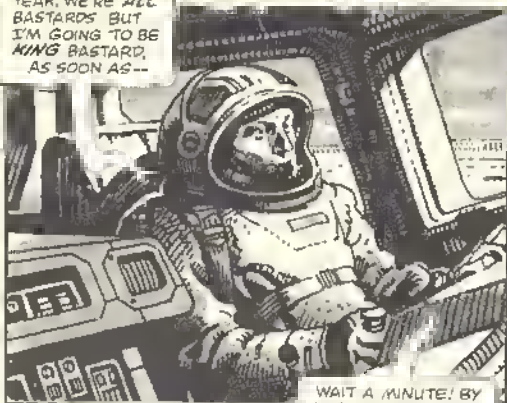
AT LEAST YOU DIED EASIER
THAN DURAN AND HIS BUNCH,
RIGHT, FOULARD? THOSE
VAULTS HAD AIR RECYCLING
SYSTEMS... COULDN'T SUFFO-
CATE. HAD TO STARVE.

FROM THE LOOKS OF IT, COULDN'T
HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH BETTER
UP *HERE*. TOOK NEARLY A
HUNDRED YEARS TO WORK UP
THE NERVE, BUT ONCE THEY
GOT DOWN TO IT, THE EAST
AND WEST ZONES DID QUITE
A *JOB*. A LOT MORE *COMPLETE*
THAN EITHER SIDE EXPECTED

AND THEY NEVER KNEW THEY
HAD *HELP*... THAT THE COLONIES
WERE SICK OF FIGHTING TO
SURVIVE WHILE SUPPORTING
TWO TIRED, AGING POLITICAL
SYSTEMS... AND PLANTED
AGENTS ON BOTH SIDES TO
PROD... TO PROVOKE... TO
FINALLY BRING IT *ON*!

BUT YOU KNEW THAT, FOULARD...
YOU WERE *ONE* OF THEM. AND
CORRUPT ENOUGH YOURSELF
TO ACCEPT A COUPLE OF NUTRI-
ENT BRICKS I BROUGHT UP AS
A *BRIBE* FOR TAKING ME OFF-
WORLD WITH YOU.

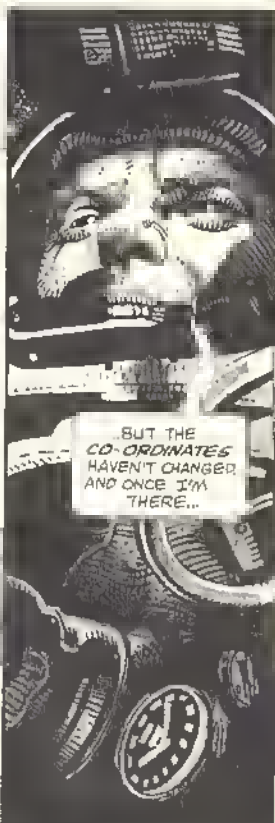
YEAH, WE'RE ALL
BASTARDS BUT
I'M GOING TO BE
KING BASTARD
AS SOON AS--



WAIT A MINUTE! BY
NOW THERE SHOULD
BE

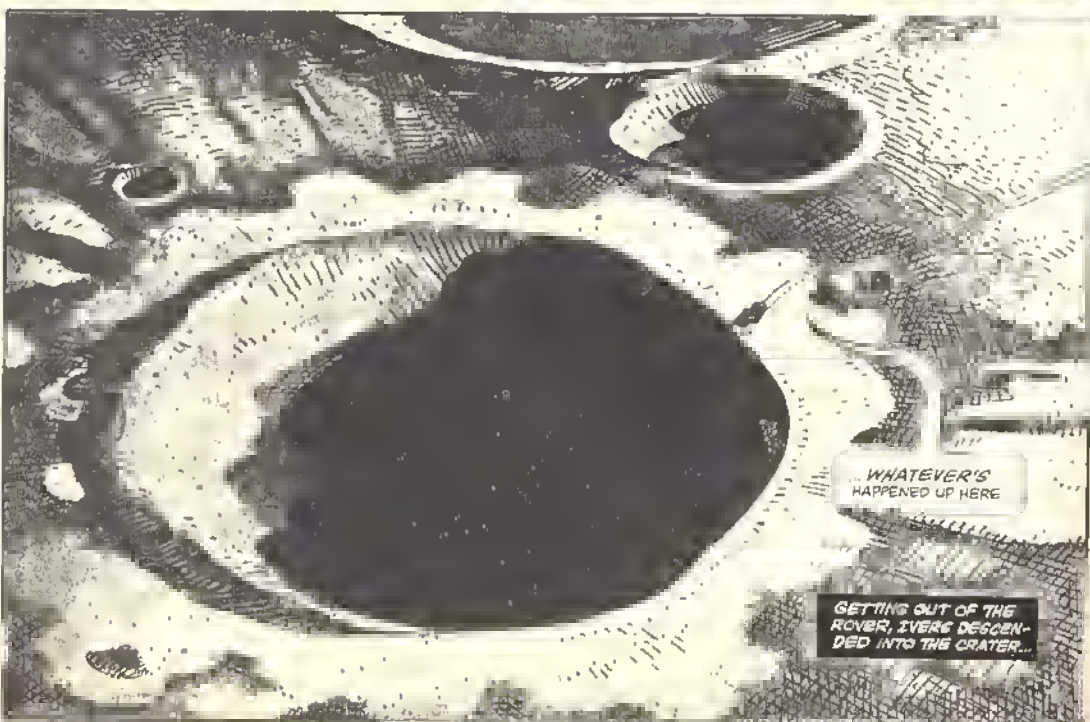


GOT IT! THEY
CAN BLAST AWAY
MOST LANDMARKS
AND EVERY LIVING
SOUL...



BUT THE
CO-ORDINATES
HAVEN'T CHANGED
AND ONCE I'M
THERE...

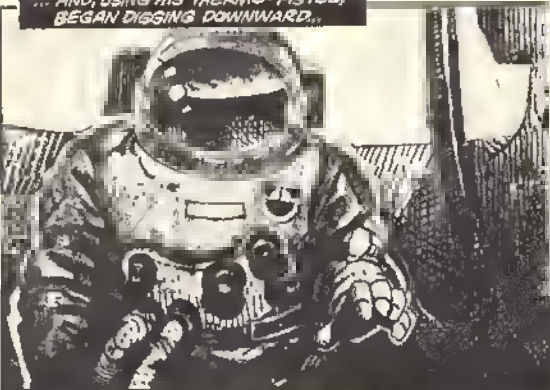
"...I CAN FINE-TUNE
THE TRACKER TO THE
EXACT CHEMICAL COM-
POSITION OF THE
NUTRIENT BRICKS.
WITH THAT KIND OF
MASS, THERE'S NO
WAY I CAN'T PIN-
POINT THE VAULT..."



...WHATEVER'S
HAPPENED UP HERE

GETTING OUT OF THE
ROVER, IVERS DESCEN-
DED INTO THE CRATER...

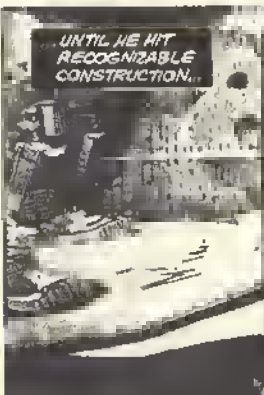
... AND, USING HIS THERMO-PISTOL,
BEGAN DIGGING DOWNWARD...



IVERS ALLOWED HIMSELF A
MOMENT'S ANTICIPATION BE-
FORE BREAKING THROUGH.

OUT IN THE COLONIES, WHERE ALIEN SOILS WERE
LARGELY INFERTILE, NUTRIENT BRICKS OUTVALUED
URANIUM. IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITY, THEY SPELLED
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBSISTING AND
THRIVING...

UNTIL HE HIT
RECOGNIZABLE
CONSTRUCTION...



...AND HIS WRIST-SCOPE
COMPUTED HE WAS JUST
ABOVE THE ACCESS TUNNEL
HE WANTED.

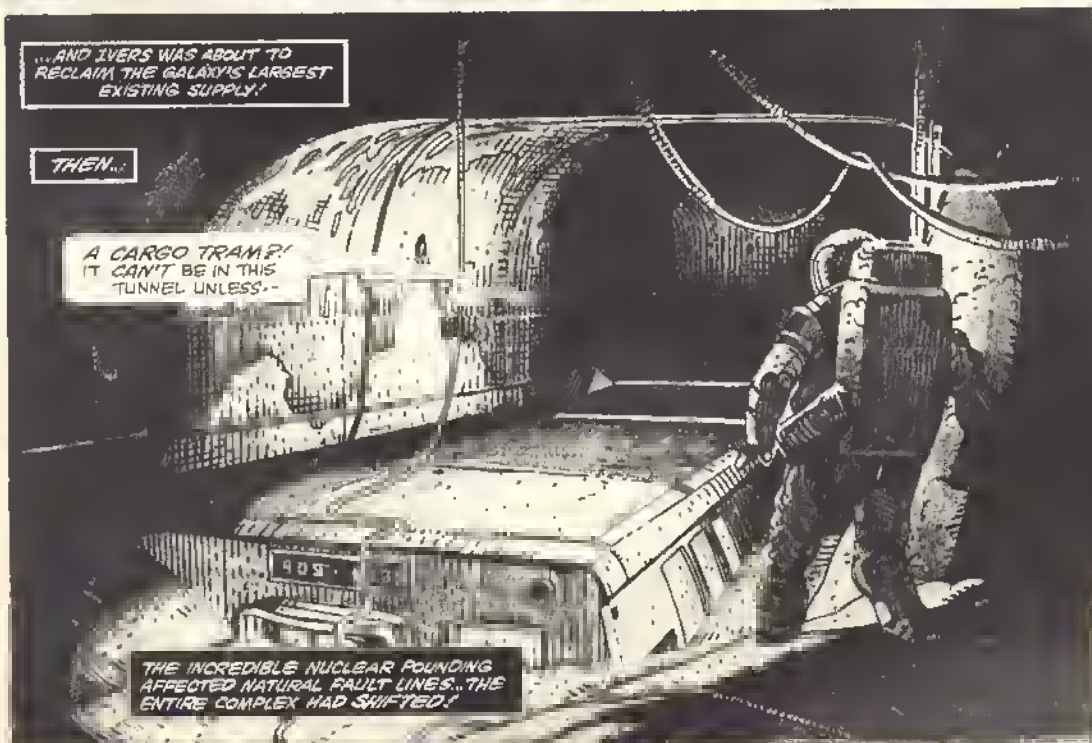


...AND IVERS WAS ABOUT TO
RECLAIM THE GALAXY'S LARGEST
EXISTING SUPPLY!

THEN...

A CARGO TRAM?
IT CAN'T BE IN THIS
TUNNEL UNLESS--

THE INCREDIBLE NUCLEAR POUNDING
AFFECTED NATURAL FAULT LINES..THE
ENTIRE COMPLEX HAD SHIFTED!



IVERS FELT A STEADY MOUNTING SENSE OF PANIC.

TRAM CARS ARE
FILLED WITH
RADIOACTIVE ASH...!

IF THE VAULTS HAVE
CRACKED... IF THE SAME
THING HAPPENED THERE...

THE NUTRIENT
COMPOUNDS COULD
HAVE BROKEN DOWN...!
THE BRICKS DISSOLVED
INTO NOTHING...!

HE FOUGHT BACK THE
THOUGHT, GIVING HIS
WRIST-SCOPE ADJUSTED
COMPUTATIONS...

...IVERS HONED IN ONCE
MORE ON HIS GOAL.

AND...

FINALLY...! AND THE VAULT
DOOR IS STILL INTACT... STILL
SEALED! THERE'S A
CHANCE...!

INSIDE HIS SUIT, IVERS'S
FINGERS WERE MOIST
AS THEY SWIFTLY DIALED
THE PROPER CODES.

THERE WAS AN INSTANT'S
RESISTANCE, THEN...

AT LEAST SOME
THINGS WERE BUILT
TO LAST!

BUT ALL THAT
WAS TRULY
IMPORTANT HAD
SURVIVED.

BE YEARS
BEFORE ANY
COLONY CAN
HOPE TO
PRODUCE
SOMETHING
OF THIS
QUALITY OR
QUANTITY.

THEY'LL DEAL... HELL!
THEY'LL CUT EACH OTHER'S
THROATS TO GIVE ME
WHATEVER I WANT!

AND WHAT
YOU DESERVE,
IVERS?

WITHIN, THERE WAS
EVIDENCE OF STEADY
RADIATION SEEPAGE
AND STRUCTURAL
DAMAGE...



W-WHO...?

BUT IVERS ALREADY KNEW... FELT IT LIKE AN ICICLE IN HIS HEART... EVEN BEFORE THEY SHUFFLED INTO VIEW FROM THE VAULT'S DARK RECESSES...



... EATING SOMETHING!

DURAN...?
H-HOW...?

MANY OF US DIED WHEN THE COMPLEX SHIFTED, IVERS... WE BURIED THEM THE ONLY WAY WE COULD... PILING NUTRIENT BRICKS OVER THEM.

THEN THE RADIATION HIT US... AND IN TIME, STARVATION...



... UNTIL WE REALIZED THERE WAS FOOD... IF WE WANTED TO SURVIVE BADLY ENOUGH... TO EAT IT.



AND MOST OF US DID, IVERS... BECAUSE WE KNEW YOU WOULD BE BACK, SO WE ATE OUR OWN DEAD. AND FOUND THE BRICKS' NUTRIENTS HAD REACTED UPON THAT DECAYED FLESH, ENRICHING IT...

IT MORE THAN SUSTAINS US... IT LETS US THRIVE AMID THE RADIATION!

WE COULD LIVE FOREVER, IVERS... AS LONG AS WE KEEP FINDING FOOD.

FOOD!

FOOD!

FOOD!

W-WAIT...! TRAPPING YOU IN HERE WAS AN ACCIDENT...! I-I CAME BACK TO RESCUE YOU... TO...

... FRY ANY OF YOU ZOMBIES
WHO GET IN MY WAY!

FWOOMP!

IT DIDN'T STOP
THEM. IVERS
DIDN'T EXPECT
IT TO, BUT IT
SLOWED THEM
ENOUGH...

... TO MAKE ESCAPE CERTAIN!

WOOF!

CERTAIN...

LATER, DURAN AND
THE OTHERS REVELLED
IN THE NEW FOOD AND
IN THE KNOWLEDGE
THAT AT LAST THEY
WERE FREE, FREE TO
LEAVE THE VAULT FOR
WHAT WAITED ABOVE...

A TERRAIN ROVER,
A SHUTTLE, A SHIP
TRANSPORTATION TO THE
COLONIES WHICH,
DESPITE THEIR PART
IN ITS DESTRUCTION,
WOULD AGAIN BE
SUPPORTING EARTH...

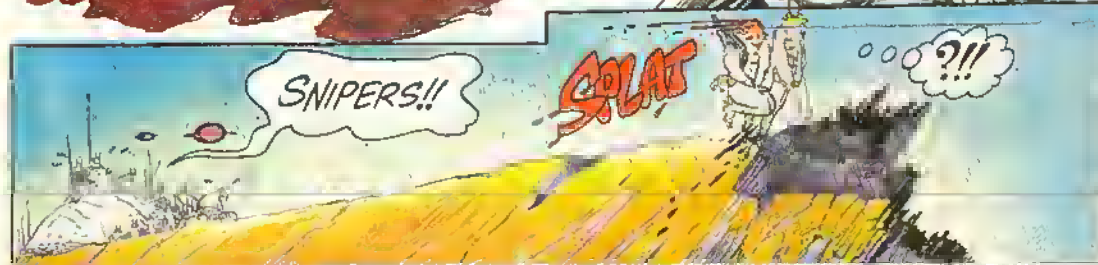
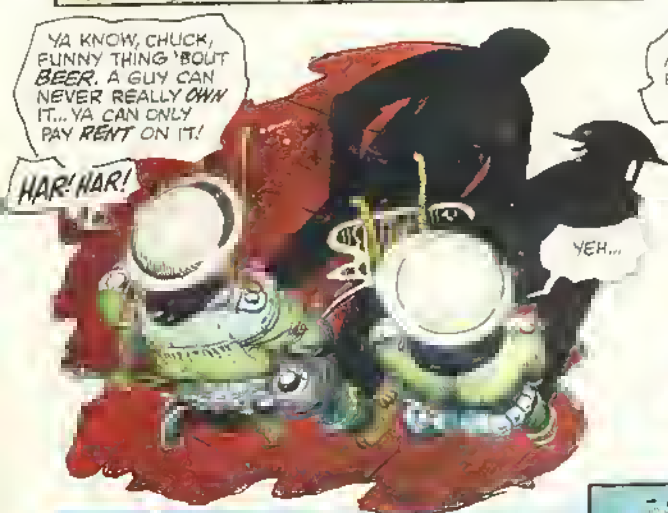
... UNTIL HE SUDDENLY
DISCOVERED JUST
HOW EXTENSIVE
STRUCTURAL DAMAGE
TO THE VAULT HAD
BEEN...

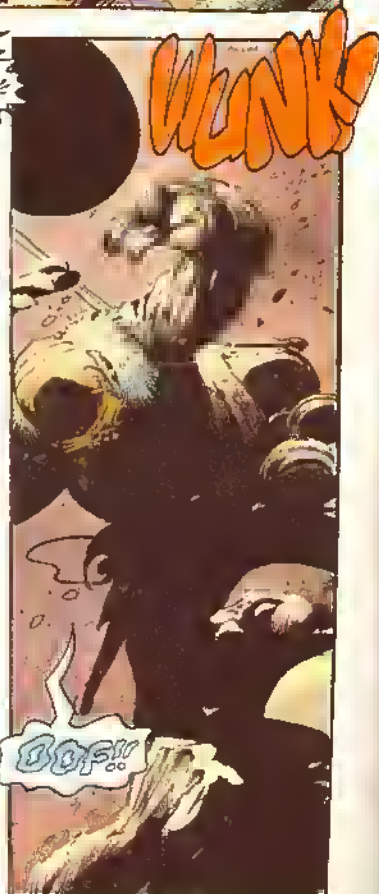
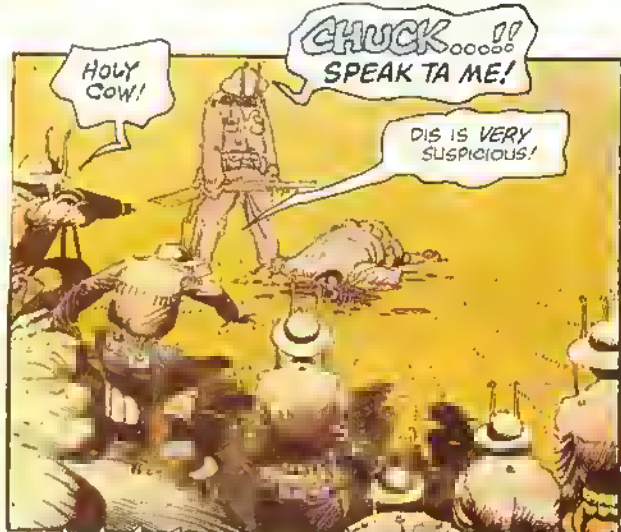
KLONG!

... AND THAT HALF A TON
OF NUTRIENT BRICKS
COULD BURY A MAN
THOROUGHLY AND
FINALLY AS SEALING
HIM UNDERGROUND.

... BY FEEDING
ITS FINAL
SURVIVORS.

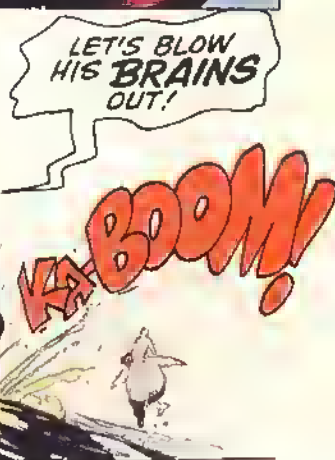
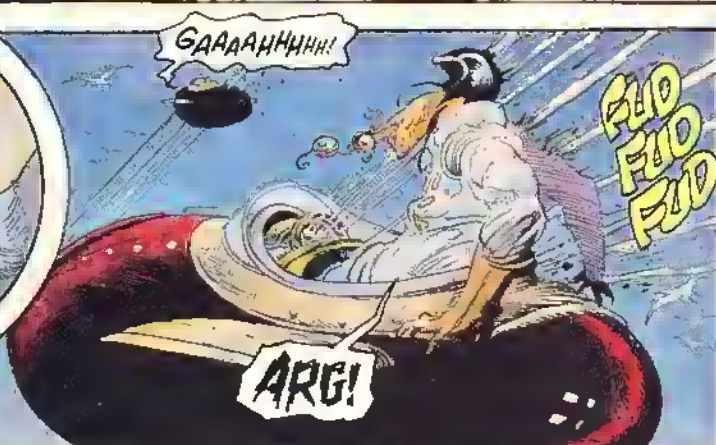
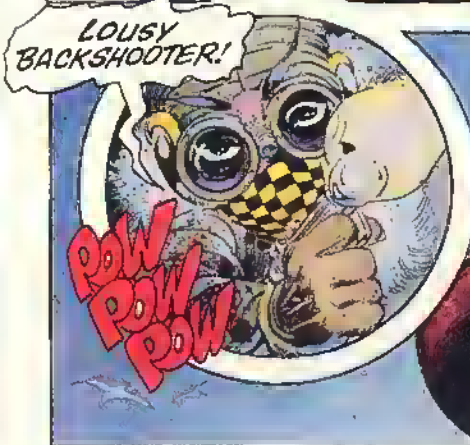
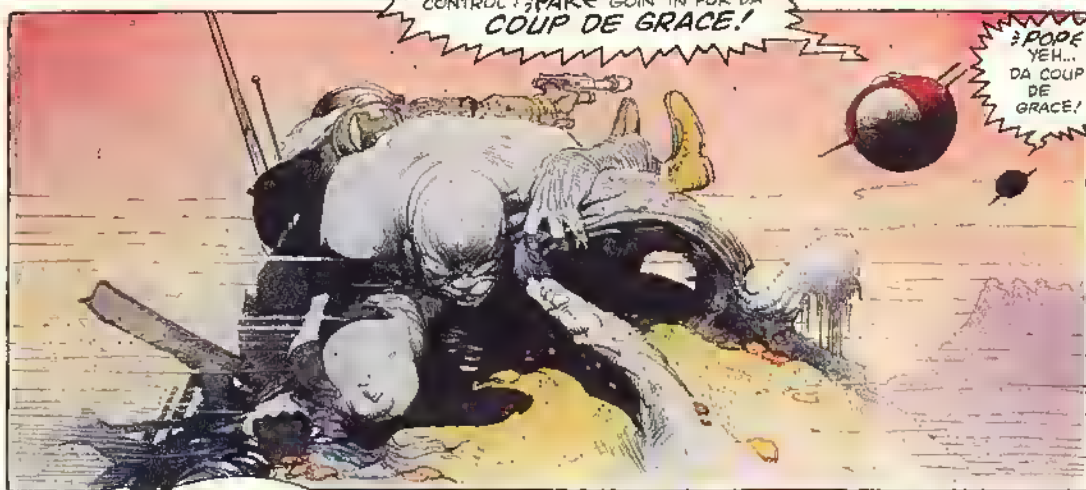
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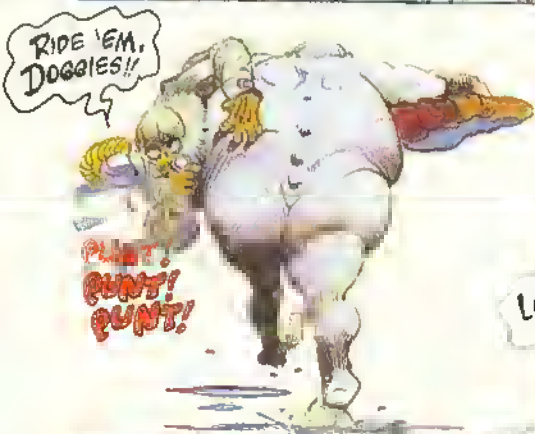
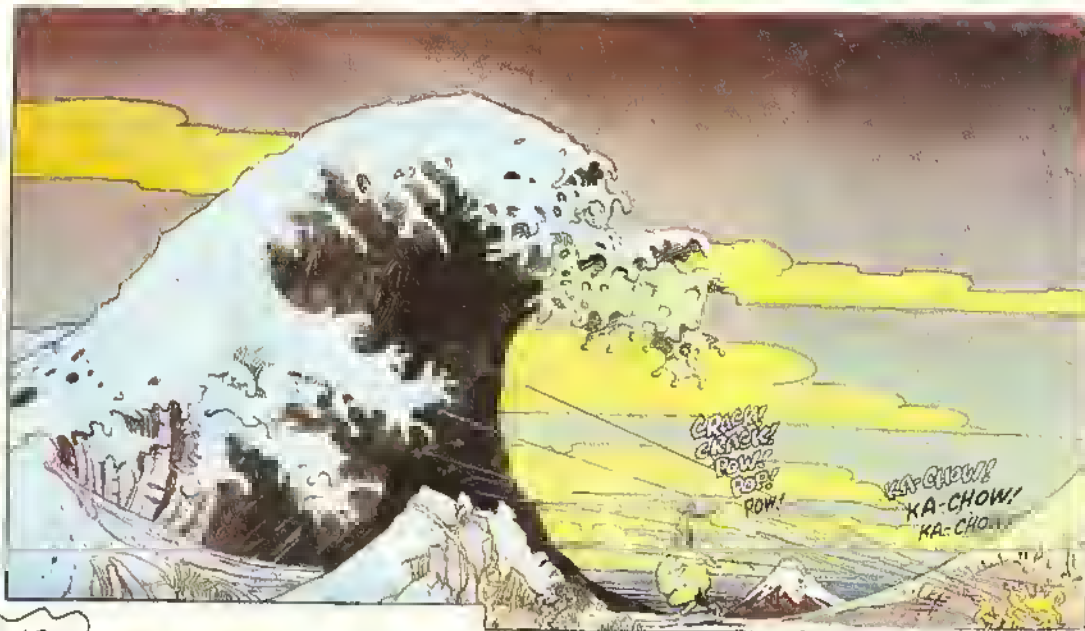




BUZZ POP! AIR PATROL T'GROUND
CONTROL! **PAKE GOIN' IN FOR DA
COUP DE GRACE!**

POPE
YEH...
DA COUP
DE
GRACE!





CRIST!

WE'RE TH' ONLY ONES LEFT!
ALL RIGHT, MEN... WE'RE GONNA
SHIELD THE FERTILIZER WITH
OUR VERY OWN BODIES...
RIGHT?!

YEP!

Uff-fuff!

DUCK!



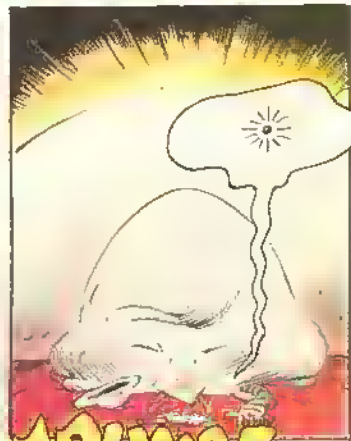
OOPS...



RUN
AWAY!

GYAAAA!

AHHHHH!



FRUMP!

YUK!

WELL, I GUESS
THAT'S THE LAST
OF TH--

UNREKNOWINST TO CHOLLY AND FLYTRAP
IS THE DRIVER... A HUGE, UGLY BEAST...
SHORT ON BRAINS, LONG ON MUSCLE!

HA!

POW!

??!

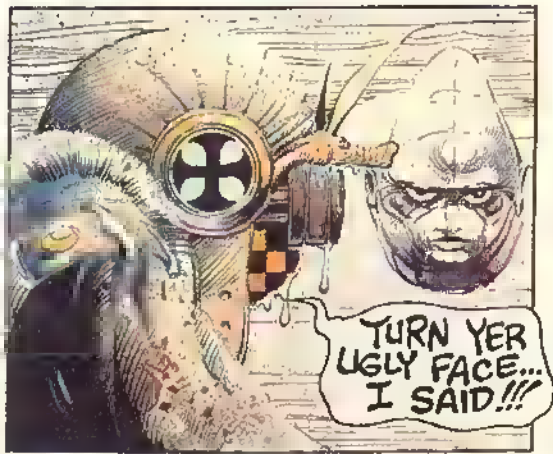
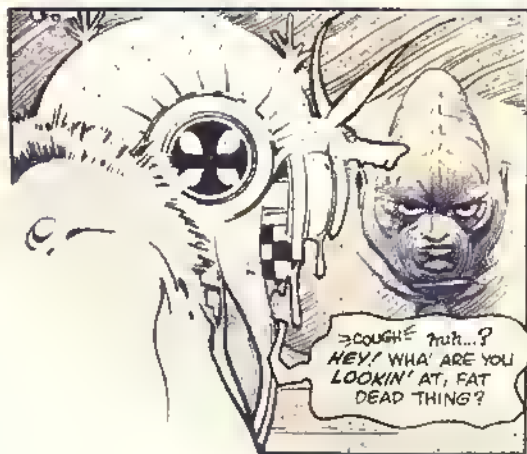
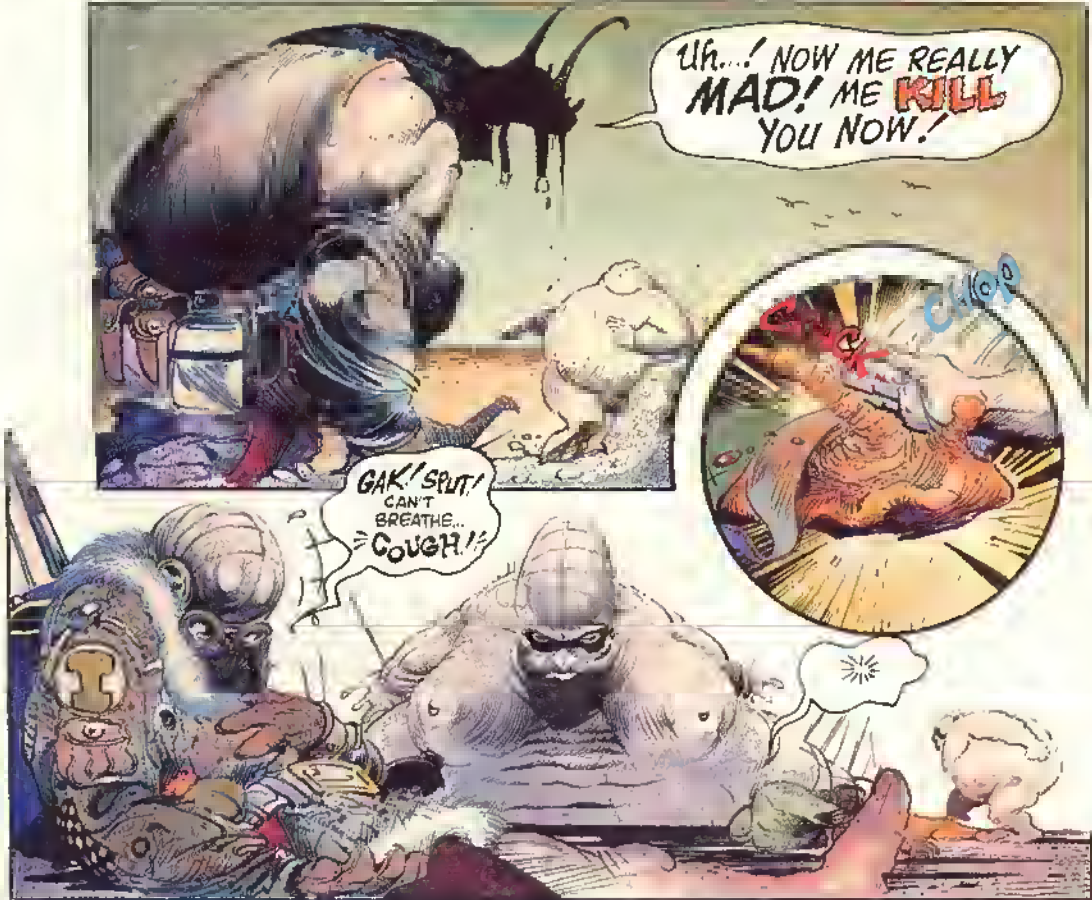
YA! ME SQUISH
LITTLE BUG
MAN!! **YA!**

GAASP MEBBE... I...
CHORE
OVERLOOKED... ONE...

RUNT!

DOE!

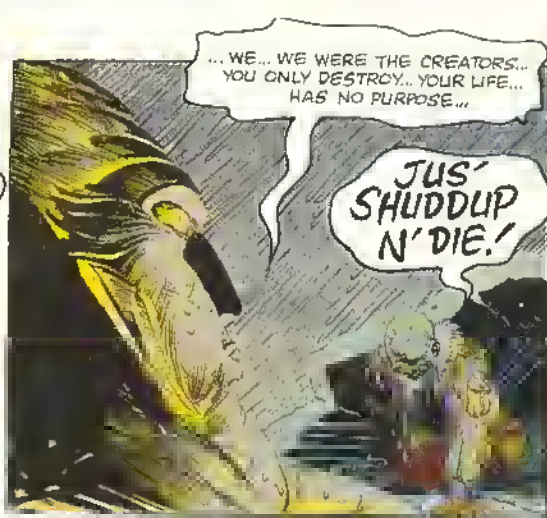
FAR!





...I SEE YOU... A PORTRAIT
OF LONELINESS... OF ANGUISH...
OF DEATH.

SHUDDUP!



... WE... WE WERE THE CREATORS...
YOU ONLY DESTROY... YOUR LIFE...
HAS NO PURPOSE...

**JUS'
SHUDDUP
N'DIE!**

YOU MOVE... BREATHE...
BUT THERE IS... NO LIFE...

YOU... ARE NOT A MAN... I
BET YOU GOT... A TINY
WEE-WEE...! **ACK!**

**SHUDDUP!
SHUDDUP!
SHUDDUP!
SHUDDUP!**

**PUN-TA!
PUN-TA!
PUN-TA!
PUN-TA!**

TORRENT RAINS
BEAT MERCILESSLY
ON THE VALLEY.
THE NEW LIFE, BORN
OF THE FERTILIZER,
STRUGGLED BRAVELY
AGAINST THE VIOLENT
FLOODS THAT RIPPED
AND CLAWED AT ITS
VERY ROOTS.

IN THE END, THE FLOOD ENDURED, WASHING THE
TINY FLOWERS... THE GREEN GRASS... THE FRESH
MOSS... INTO A RIVER OF MUD THAT WOULD
SOON HARDEN AND CRACK UNDER AN ANGRY SUN...

... SMOTHERING
THEM FOREVER

BLOW CRUEL WIND.
DECAY BE YOUR
FLAG...

... DESOLATION YOUR
SONG... DEATH YOUR
REALITY. BLOW IN THE
RITES OF SPRING...
ON THIS PERFECT
WORLD.



Long months the quest had lasted. From Spring to Summer to Fall. One by one, the knights of lesser resolve had fallen away as hardship and danger swelled, until but a handful of gallant Lords and loyal Squires remained. Now, as wind and rain took on the cold, cruel edge of Winter, even these faltered. Weary, heartsick with failure, their dedication broke. Among them, only Sir Tristram of Stonehelm hewed willfully to their vowed task, their sacred search for that which continued so agonizingly to elude them...

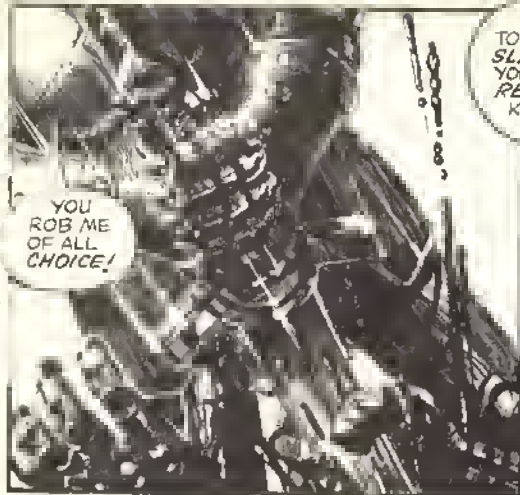
Art by MIKE SAENZ
Story by ARCHIE GOODWIN

GRAIL

YIELD, LAXTON!
DON'T GIVE IN TO THE
DEVIL'S MADNESS!

THE ONLY
MADNESS IS
TO KEEP HUNTING
THAT WHICH
DOESN'T
EXIST!





HAS IT COME TO THIS? I MUST SLAY ONE AMONG YOU TO HOLD THE REST TO THEIR KNIGHTLY OATHS?! THAT--



SIR TRISTAM...!



... YOUR WORDS ARE WASTED, I FEAR. WE COULD GIVE PURSUIT, BUT--



NO! IF LAXTON'S DEFEAT DIDN'T SHOW THEM WHERE RIGHT LIES... NOTHING WILL! PERHAPS IT WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE I ALONE WHO COMPLETES THE QUEST, WHO--

SIRE!

IT FLOATED AMID THE TREES, A SHIMMERING VISION, ALMOST SEEMING TO BECKON...



THE HORSES, GILES...! SWIFTLY... BEFORE IT VANISHES!

THEY RODE HARD. THE IMAGE OF THE GRAIL FADING, REAPPEARING... DRAWING THEM ON. UNTIL...



...A
VILLAGE
LOOMED.
AND WITH
IT...

...THE
RIPE
STENCH OF
PESTILENCE
AND
DEATH!



CORPSES STACKED LIKE FIRE-
WOOD, SIR TRISTAM... **PLAGUE!**
EVEN THOSE IT DIDN'T CONSUME
SEEM TO HAVE GONE MAD AND
SLAIN EACH OTHER!

SURELY THE OBJECT
OF OUR QUEST CAN'T BE HERE,
SQUIRE... **NOTHING** SURVIVES!
REMOUNT AND WE'LL--



**HELP
ME...! IF
ANY ARE WITH-
IN HEARING...
SAVE ME
PLEASE!**

USE YOUR
VOICE FOR
PRAYER,
WITCH...



...THE MOMENT
IS AT HAND TO MAKE
PAYMENT FOR THE
EVIL YOU'VE
WROUGHT!

I'M INNOCENT!
MY ONLY CRIME IS
TREATING THOSE
CURSED BY THE
SICKNESS!

HARLOT OF
SATAN! YOU SOUGHT
TO STEAL THEIR SOULS!
THE SICKNESS IS YOUR
MASTER'S WORK... WHY
ELSE WOULD YOU
ESCAPE IT?!



IN
THE
NAME OF
MERCY...!

THERE
IS NONE FOR
WITCHES! ONLY
PURGING BY
THE FLAME!



YOU'D BURN THE ONE
TOUCH OF BEAUTY LEFT
IN THIS PLAGUE-FOULED
NEST...?

WROK!

NO!

GILES!

HAS THE *PLAGUE* INFECTED YOU...
OR THE SAME *MADNESS* WHICH OVERTOOK
OUR *COMRADES* ON THIS JOURNEY? HOW
CAN YOU *TAINT* OUR QUEST FOR THE
GRAIL BY STRIKING A *HOLY MAN*?!

THE LEGENDARY AGE OF
ARTHUR IS LONG PAST, BUT
DARKNESS STILL ABOUNDS... THERE
IS *NEED* TO REDISCOVER THAT SACRED
OBJECT, TO RENEW OUR FAITH AND
DIRECTION, AS THE GREATEST OF HIS
KNIGHTS DID! ALL OTHER DEEDS *PALE*
BESIDE THAT... AND I WILL NOT SEE
SUCCESS *DASHED* BECAUSE YOU
FORGET *EVIL* MAY WEAR A
FAIR FACE!

IT MAY
WEAR *ANY*
FACE, SIR
TRISTAM!

WE'VE SEEN
DEATH *ENOUGH*
THIS DAY, SIRE...
DON'T MAKE ME
DEFY YOU TO
AVOID AN *UN-*
NECESSARY
ONE!

YOU
PRESS ME,
GILES! BUT FOR
YOUR *PAST*
LOYALTY...

SIR KNIGHT... *PLEASE!*
HEED YOUR SQUIRE! OBSERVE
THE PRIEST...

... HE *EXPIRES!* THE DISEASE
DROVE HIM TO FIX BLAME ON *ME*.
THAT... AND THE *FEAR* THAT...

...IN MAKING
HIS ROUNDS
OF THE COUNTRY,
HE BROUGHT
THE *PLAGUE*
HERE!

TRISTAN SHEATHED
HIS BLADE, LETTING
THE MATTER PASS,
UNRESOLVED...

... AND RELUCTANTLY LET
THE WOMAN LEAD THEM
TO **SHELTER** AGAINST
THE MOUNTING SNOW AND
SWIFT FALL OF NIGHT.

ON GUARD, HE
SLEPT FITFULLY,
BUT FOUND LITTLE
TO DISTURB HIM
BEYOND THE NOISE
OF THE WIND... AND
THE MURMUR AND
MOVEMENT OF TWO
PEOPLE IN THE
ACT OF LOVE.

WITH FIRST LIGHT, THE SNOW STILL FLEW...

DON'T GO!
THIS STORM
WILL **WORSEN**...
LAST DAYS!

MY DUTY'S
WITH MY LORD.
DEDICATION TO
THIS QUEST HAS
MADE HIM
RIGID...

...BUT THERE'S NO **FINER** WARRIOR! HE'S
SAVED MY LIFE IN COUNTLESS BATTLES!
IF WE RIDE TO THE EARTH'S EDGE... I
MUST FOLLOW HIM!

OUTSIDE, THE SKY WAS SLATE GRAY AND TREACHEROUS. SHE
CALLED AFTER THE SQUIRE, BEGGING HIM TO RECONSIDER.

THE SOONER
WE **FIND** THE
GRAIL, THE SOONER
I CAN **RETURN**.
RETURN TO
STAY!

WITHIN HOURS, THE STORM-
WAS UPON THEM IN ALL
ITS RAGING FURY...

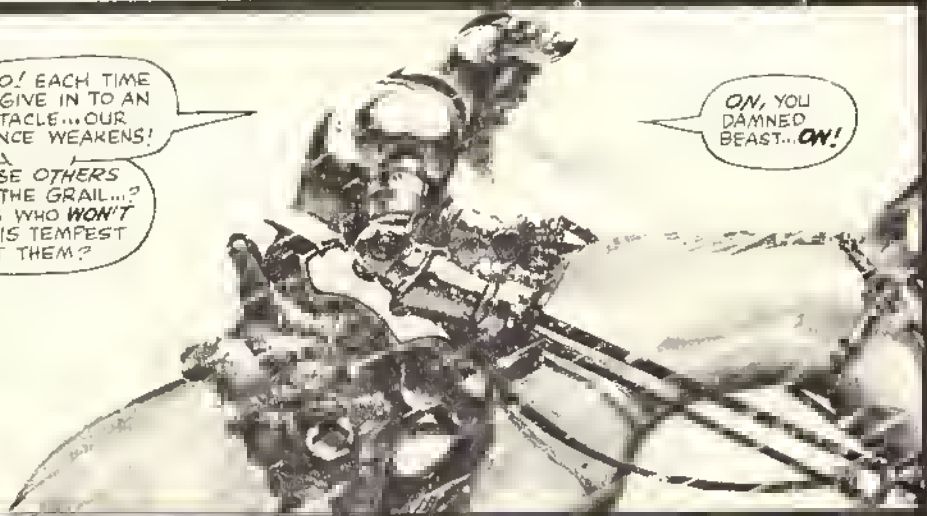
YOUR STEED FALTERS,
SIR TRISTAM! WITHOUT
REST AND COVER, IT WILL
PERISH SURELY AS MINE
DID! AND WE SHALL
SWIFTLY FOLLOW!



NO! EACH TIME
WE GIVE IN TO AN
OBSTACLE...OUR
CHANCE WEAKENS!

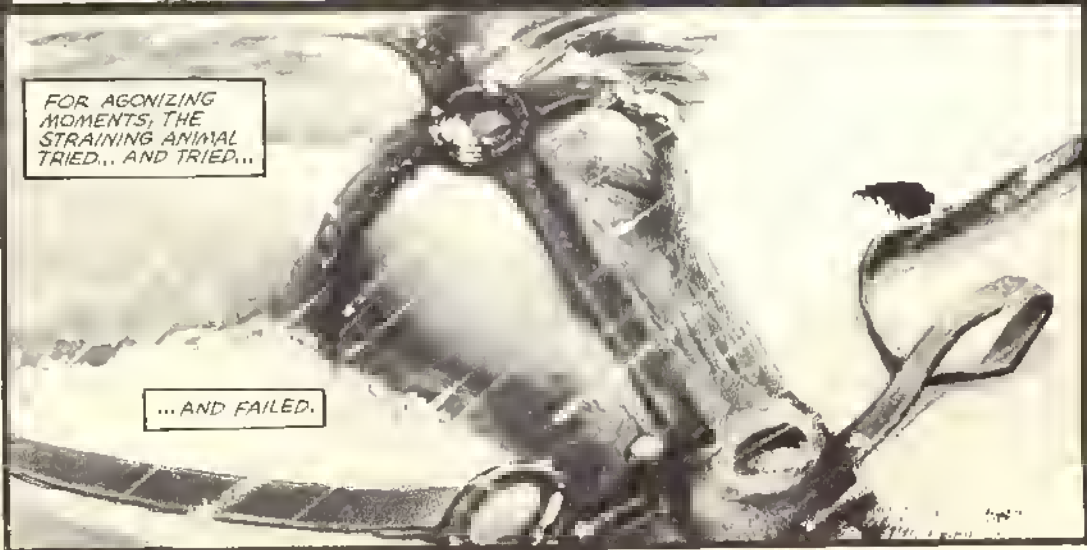
SUPPOSE OTHERS
SEEK THE GRAIL...?
OTHERS WHO *WON'T*
LET THIS TEMPEST
HALT THEM?

ON, YOU
DAMNED
BEAST...ON!



FOR AGONIZING
MOMENTS, THE
STRAINING ANIMAL
TRIED... AND TRIED...

... AND FAILED.





P-PERHAPS I SHOULDN'T
HAVE CURSED HIM, GILES...
CARRIED ME SINCE... THE
CHARGE AT RAVENSCOURT...
ALWAYS SO STRONG...

NOTHING'S THE MATCH
FOR... THIS S-STORM,
SIRE...! SEEMS TO BE...
A CAVE IN THOSE
ROCKS... IF WE CAN



WHAT...?! COME
BACK HERE! I
COMMAND IT,
SQUIRE! WE MUST
GO ON! THIS IS A
TESTING... THIS
PROVES OUR
WORTHINESS!

I WON'T HIDE
IN A CAVE LIKE AN
ANIMAL! THAT VILLAGE
SORCERESS HAS TURNED
YOU INTO A WEAKLING!
I WON'T GIVE IN!



S-SIRE...! WE
MUST TAKE COVER...
MUST! JUST TRY
THE CAVE! JUST
LOOK!

J-JUST...



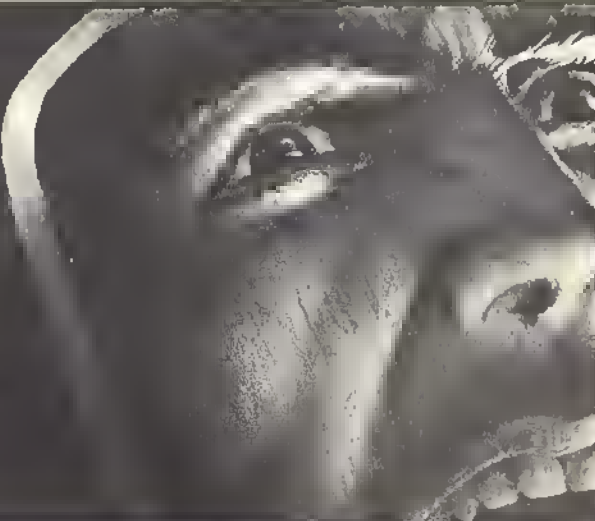
L-LIGHT.. I I SEE
LIGHT AT THE BACK OF
THE CAVE, SIR TRISTAM...!
I-IT'S...

...H-HERE...!

I-IT'S HERE!
THERE'S NO NEED
TO GO FURTHER...
TO FIGHT THE
STORM...

COME TO
THE CAVE, SIR
TRISTAM! I'VE
FOUND IT! I'VE
FOUND IT!

ABOVE THE GROANING
WIND, THE KNIGHT OF
STONESHELM HEARD
HIS SQUIRE'S HOARSE
CRY. HEARD AND
SLOWLY MADE SENSE
OF THE WILDLY
SHOUTED WORDS.



FOUND...
THE GRAIL...!
YOU'VE FOUND...
THE GRAIL...?

HE WHIRLED, AND
DESPITE ARMOR AND
STINGING, BLINDING
SNOW... HE RAN
TO THE CAVE...
AND GILES.

S-SIRE...!
W-WHAT...?

NOT YOU... NOT YOU!
IT'S MINE! I'M THE ONE
WHO STAYED WITH THE
QUEST... WHO NEVER
SWERVED... WHO ALWAYS
SACRIFICED!

I'M THE ONE!

THE
ONLY ONE
WHO DESERVES
IT...

...THE
ONLY ONE
WHO WILL
CLAIM
IT!

AND
BATHED
IN ITS
GREAT
GLOW...

... SIR
TRISTAM
SEIZED
THAT
WHICH
WAS HIS!

EEYAAHHHHH!

AND HAVING SEIZED IT...



... WAS CONSUMED BY IT!



WITHIN THE
CAVERN DARKNESS,
THE SHIMMERING
OBJECT BEGAN
TO FADE...



... AND
CHANGE.



YOU WERE
RIGHT TO CALL ME
SORCERESS, SIR
KNIGHT... AS WAS THE
PRIEST TO CALL
ME WITCH.

YET I NEVER
USED MY POWERS
TO HARM. EVEN THIS
TRANSFORMATION WAS
BUT TO LURE YOU TO
SAFETY FROM THE
STORM. YOUR OWN
ACTIONS FORCED ME
TO DO MORE!

THE WOMAN MOVED URGENTLY FORWARD TO THE
CRUMPLED, BLEEDING FIGURE ON THE STONE FLOOR.
GENTLY, SHE LIFTED HIS HEAD.

S-**SAVED** BY... **WITCH-
CRAFT**? WAS IT... ALSO
THAT WHICH BROUGHT US
TO YOUR VILLAGE?

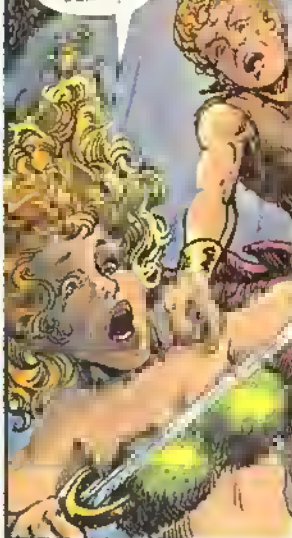
TO SAVE
ME FROM THE
STAKE...! I SENSED
YOU NEARBY AND
CONJURED THE
GRAIL IMAGE TO
BRING YOU.

SEEMINGLY
DARK POWERS MAY
STILL SERVE THE
CAUSE OF GOOD, GILES...
AS THE NOBLEST QUEST
CAN SOMETIMES
CORRUPT.

NOW REST,
MY GENTLE
SQUIRE. HEALING
TAKES LONGER
THAN DESTRUCTION.
BUT WE HAVE SAFE
SHELTER... AND
EACH OTHER.

COME TO ME, VELANNA-- I'LL FORGIVE YOU! JOIN ME ON RED SORRYLL-- IT'S YOUR LAST CHANCE!

NO! YOU'RE AGAINST US! YOU'RE THE ENEMY! YOU MUST DIE! YOU MUST BE SLA--!



VELANNA!!

THE NECKLACE, MADE FROM THE RUINS OF A REJECTED SHRINE-- THE NECKLACE WHICH WAS TYNDALL'S LAST HOPE--

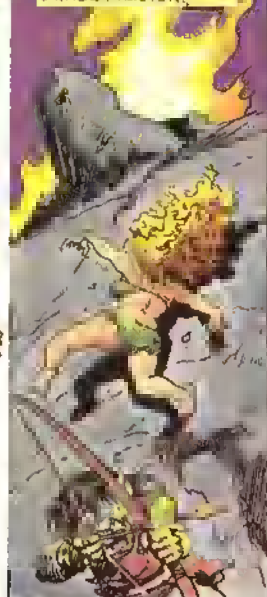


--SNAPS.

AND VELANNA FALLS.

FALLS TO THE BLASTED, BARREN GROUND FAR BELOW, FALLS TO HER DEATH.

A CRY OF TORMENT IS RIPPED RAW AND BLEEDING FROM THE THE THROAT OF A DRAGONMASTER.



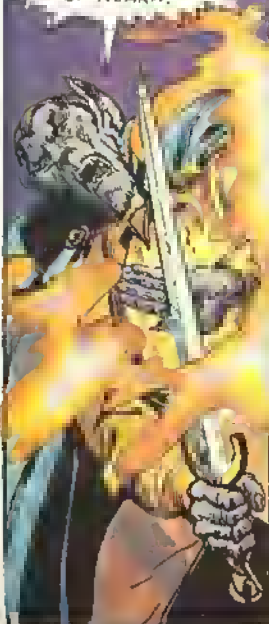
THEN ANOTHER FORM, MORE COMPOSED BUT PALER THAN ICE, SHIMMERS INTO VIEW-- JOINING VELANNA ON HER SMALL PIECE OF THE LAND OF THE DEAD.

LIANISSA! NOOO!!

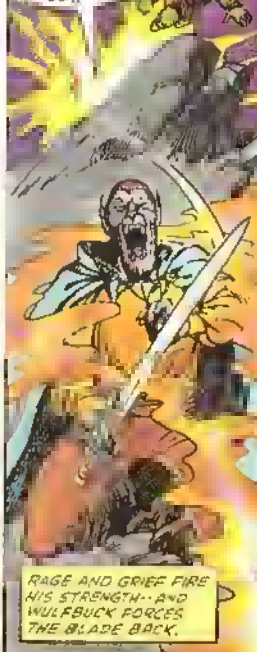


SHE'S NOT DEAD-- SHE CAN'T BE DEAD-- SHE SAID OUR LOVE WAS TOO STRONG-- THAT ITS POWER COULD NEVER DIE!!

FIGHT ON, TYNDALL! FIGHT ON, DRAGONMASTER OF KLARN!

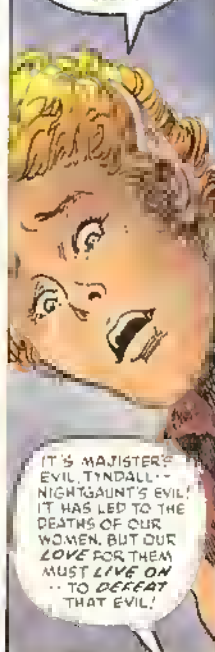


'TIS EVIL ITSELF WE FACE AND MUST CONQUER! MAJISTER SEEKS TO USE OUR WOMEN-- OUR VERY LOVE -- AGAINST US!!



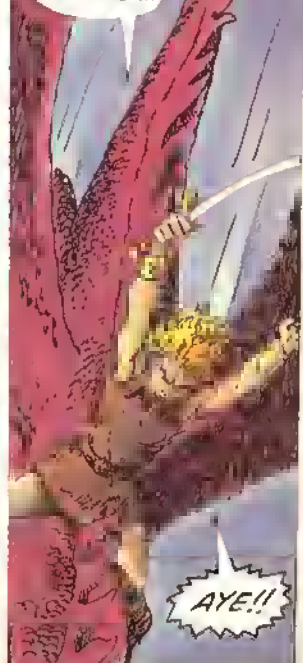
RAGE AND GRIEF FIRE HIS STRENGTH-- AND WULFBUCK FORCES THE BLADE BACK.

THE NECKLACE... THE TALISMAN SIGNIFYING OUR LOVE... IT RIPPED FROM HER NECK ...AND SHE... FELL...



IT'S MAJISTER'S EVIL, TYNDALL-- NIGHTGAUNT'S EVIL! IT HAS LED TO THE DEATHS OF OUR WOMEN, BUT OUR LOVE FOR THEM MUST LIVE ON ... TO DEFEAT THAT EVIL!

AYE, WULFBUCK...



AYE!!

NOW, SHREEKAR-- NOW, MIGHTY GOBLIN CHIEF-- ARE YOU READY TO FACE A **TRUE WARRIOR OF KLARN**? ARE YOU READY TO FIGHT A DRAGONMASTER WHO HAS JUST LOST ALL HE LIVED FOR-- AND WHO FEARS DEATH **NOT AT ALL**?

THEN COME ON--
COME ON! MY BLADE
THIRSTS FOR YOUR BLACK
GOBLIN BLOOD!

DO YOU HEAR
THE LITTLE ONE,
NIGHTGAUNT?
YOU'VE DONE
NOTHING BUT
GIVE HIM
STRENGTH--

-- THE SAME STRENGTH WHICH COURSES
THROUGH MY VEINS, AND WHICH HAS ALREADY
PERMITTED ME TO BREAK THE SPELL OF BLACK
KNOTS BINDING
GLORYWAND!

NOW,
IT WILL
PERMIT
ME TO
BREAK
YOU!

I'VE HARDLY FALLEN
YET, BEAST-MAN.

DIE, SHREEKAR!
DIE, GOBLIN
CHIEF! AND STAY
DEAD-- FOR ALL
THE HOT-COLD
SEASONS TO
COME!

HEAR ME, DRAGONS!
MASS FOR FINAL
ATTACK-- AND
SCOUR THIS LAND
OF FILTH!

NO, DAMN
YOU! STAY
BACK! THE
SHIELD--

THE SHIELD HAS BEEN
PERVERTED, NIGHTGAUNT--
AND CAN NEVER BE AS
STRONG AS IT ONCE WAS!
YOU HAVE ONLY YOURSELF
TO BLAME!

YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR IN
UNDERESTIMATING US--
TRIVIALIZING THE POWER
OF OUR LOVE!

MOST OF
YOUR DEAD ARMY
HAS ALREADY BEEN
DESTROYED--

"--AND THE DRAGONS
NOW MOVE TO
FINISH THEM!"

INDEED--AFTER
SLEEPING FOR
SO LONG AND
SO DEEPLY, THE
KLARN DRAGONS
HAVE UNTIL
NOW ACTED IN
NONVIOLENT
RESTRAINT...

BUT THE STRONG
WORDS AND STRONGER
DEEDS OF THEIR NEW
MASTER HAVE FULLY
AWAKENED THEM-- AND
THEY RESPOND WITH
ALL THE ANCIENT FIRE
AND FURY AT THEIR
COMMAND.

WULFBUCK, TOO,
COMES AWAKE--
AS DOES HIS
GLORIOUS SWORD,
ROUSED BY THE
RAGE OF GRIEF
COURSING FROM
THE HAND OF
ITS WIELDER.

A SINGLE, AWESOME SLASH-- AND BLACKNESS
FALLS AWAY IN PIECES, FREEING THE FORMER
CLEAR AND PURE SURFACE OF THE CRYSTAL SHIELD.

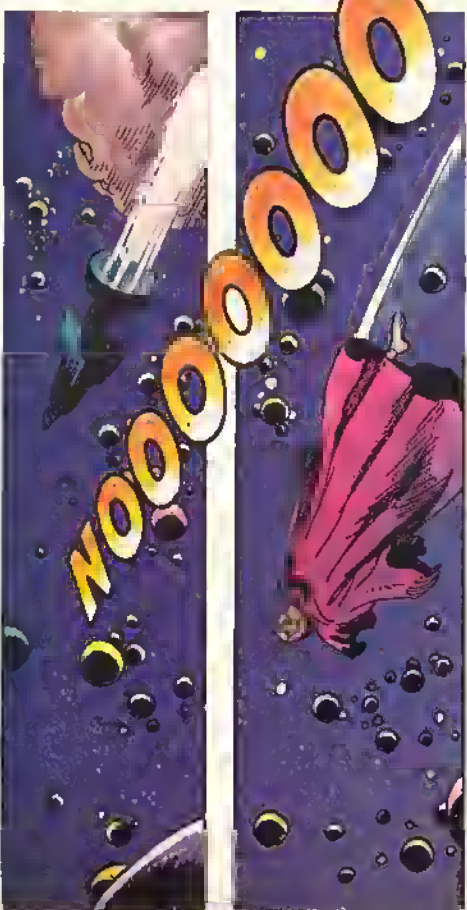


MAJISTER-
NIGHTGAUNT
STIFFENS IN
AGONY.

HMM.

HMM, INDEED, MY DARK OPPONENT--
IT WAS LONG IN COMING, BUT AT
LAST THE POWER OF MY PLAYERS
MAKES ITSELF KNOWN--

-- AND IT IS A RELIEF
INDEED TO RID THE BOARD
OF THIS BLACK PIECE.



'TIS DONE,
BEAST-MAN.

YOU HAVE LOST
AND WON... WHILE
I HAVE WON AND
LOST.



AND SO SAYING,
BLACK MAJISTER-
LORD NIGHTGAUNT-
COMES APART IN A
BLINDING BLOSSOM
OF LIGHT.

HE REAPPEARS, TRUE ENOUGH,
ONLY A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY,
PILOTING HIS BLACK CHARIOT
DRAWN BY A BLACK STEED--
BUT THE CHARIOT RETREATS,
AND HIS VOICE SPEAKS WITH
NEITHER POWER NOR EMOTION...

I HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM BOARD AND
BATTLEFIELD, AND CAN DWELL ON THIS PLANE
NO LONGER. THE CONTEST ENDS IN STALEMATE,
WITH NEITHER WINNER NOR LOSER.

AND ASIDE FROM
THE PILOT--ASIDE FROM
ME--THE BLACK CHARIOT
MUST RETURN TO THE
VAULTS OF THE STARS...
EMPTY,

EPILOGUE:

MAJISTER WAS
RIGHT, WULFBUCK
...WE WON...BUT
THE CONTEST
ENDS WITH NO
WINNER.

AYE, AND THAT'S
AS IT SHOULD BE
...BUT OUR LOVE
DID NOT DIE.
DRAGONMASTER,
AND MAYHAP IT
CAN YET CON-
QUER FALSE
DEATHS.

AYE--AND IF YOU
WOULD JOIN ME IN
SACRIFICE, FRIEND
ELF, LAY YOUR
HAND UPON THE
SWORD...

GIVE
YOUR LOVE TO GLORY-
WAND AS LIANISSA
DID, AND AS
I DO NOW...

...AND LET THAT
LOVE COURSE FROM
THE BLADE--AND
THROUGH THE CLEANSSED
CRYSTAL--TO THE
OBJECTS OF OUR
LOVE LYING
BEYOND.

IN THAT MOMENT
OF RELEASED
LOVE--AND SACRI-
FICED POWER--
THE SWORD DIES.

F. FALSE..?

AND-- THE...THE POWER OF MY SOUL-SPRITES...
AND OF GLORYWAND...AND SOME OTHER
POWER...FILLS ME...BURNING AWAY THE RED MIST...

Y-YES...
AND I...
I WAS
WRONG...

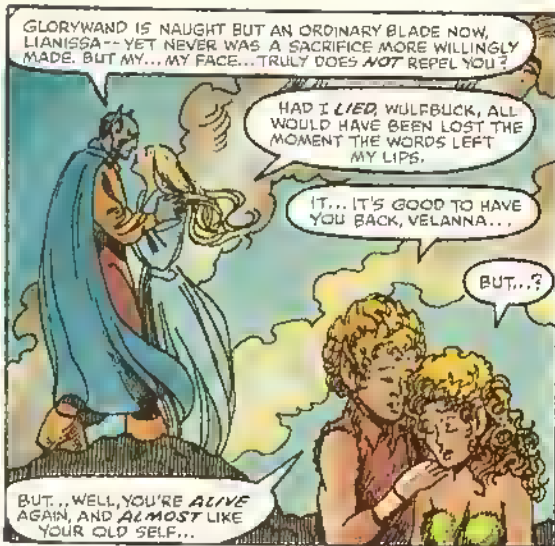
THEY DECEIVED ME--
PERVERTED ME EVEN
AS THEY PERVERTED
THE CRYSTAL! TYNDALL
IS NOT EVIL...

YOU, MURKANDOR...
YOU ARE EVIL!

THE
STATUE--
IT
SPEAKS!

AND
EXPLODES.

AND MURKANDOR FALLS
THE LENGTH OF A VERY
LONG SCREAM.



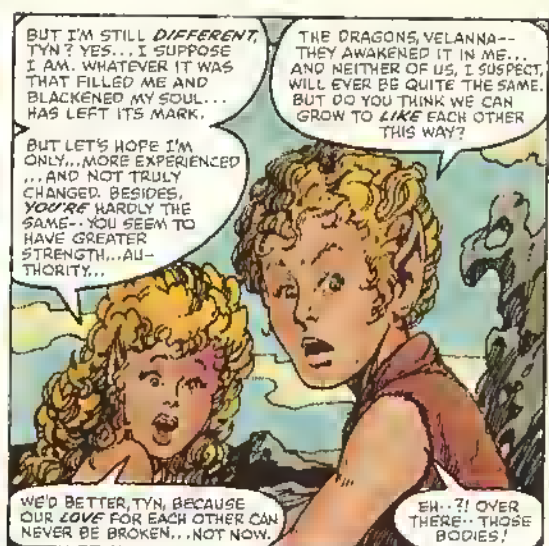
GLORYWAND IS NAUGHT BUT AN ORDINARY BLADE NOW, LIANISSA-- YET NEVER WAS A SACRIFICE MORE WILLINGLY MADE. BUT MY... MY FACE... TRULY DOES *NOT* REPEL YOU?

HAD I *LIED*, WULFBUCK, ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN LOST THE MOMENT THE WORDS LEFT MY LIPS.

IT... IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK, VELANNA...

BUT...?

BUT... WELL, YOU'RE *ALIVE* AGAIN, AND *ALMOST* LIKE YOUR OLD SELF...



BUT I'M STILL *DIFFERENT*, TYN? YES... I SUPPOSE I AM. WHATEVER IT WAS THAT FILLED ME AND BLACKENED MY SOUL... HAS LEFT ITS MARK.

BUT LET'S HOPE I'M ONLY... MORE EXPERIENCED ... AND NOT TRULY CHANGED. BESIDES, *YOU'RE* HARDLY THE SAME-- YOU SEEM TO HAVE GREATER STRENGTH... AUTHORITY...

THE DRAGONS, VELANNA-- THEY AWAKENED IT IN ME... AND NEITHER OF US, I SUSPECT, WILL EVER BE QUITE THE SAME. BUT DO YOU THINK WE CAN GROW TO *LIKE* EACH OTHER THIS WAY?

WE'D BETTER, TYN, BECAUSE OUR *LOVE* FOR EACH OTHER CAN NEVER BE BROKEN... NOT NOW.

EH...? OVER THERE-- THOSE BODIES!



THE GOBLIN-ZOMBIES! THEY'RE SHIFTING--*MOVING*!

ARE... ARE THEY COMING BACK TO LIFE *AGAIN*--?!!



NOPE.

UHN! FHYEW! LOUSY ZOMBIES!

JUST CUZ THEY DIED AGAIN. THEY DIDN'T HAVETA BURY ME.

SO WHAT'S UP? DID WE WIN YET--?



THEY LAUGH, AND IN THE LAUGHTER TENSION IS PURGED.

THEN TYNDALL SIMPLY SAYS, "YES"...

...AND WISHES HE COULD HURL THE SINGLE WORD A THOUSAND TIMES, ON WINGS, INTO THE FACE OF THE DAWNING SUN.